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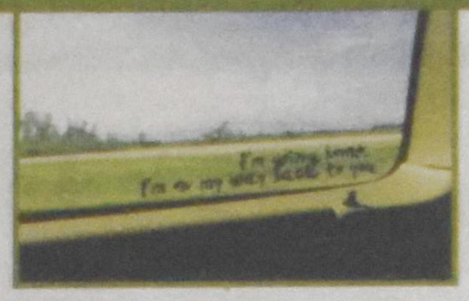

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Through any storm
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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Theme issue: Home

Not at home in Canada: The PQ push for sovereignty

Premier Pauline Marois lunches at a Québécois cafe where the menu – and perhaps soon the food – must be mostly French.

Lisa Hoekstra

Premier Pauline Marois recently announced that she wanted Quebec residents to increase their locally-grown food consumption to 50 percent. It's one of several strategies that the Parti Québécois has implemented in an attempt to bolster "national" pride within Quebec. Although, in this case, national does not mean Canadian.

The changes started with an increased pressure on restaurants to provide completely French menus. In February, an Italian restaurant in Montreal was ordered to remove the word "pasta," because it was not in French, from its menus by the Office québécois de la langue française. A few other Italian words on the menu offended Quebec's "language police." But this isn't the first or the last time that Quebec's small businesses have undergone the scrutiny of government officials – and it is only the beginning stages of several new laws that the Parti Québécois (PQ) is aiming to enforce.

Ever since the PQ won minority government, it seems like the political landscape in Quebec has been shifting. But the reality is that strong separatist feelings from 1995, buried since the failed referendum, have simply resurfaced. As Premier Pauline Marois stated, "Sovereignty is as alive as it was. But there is work to do to convince Quebecers." The 49.44 percent of Quebec residents that wanted to sever the province from Canada 18 years ago have not changed their stance. They've merely been biding their time, strengthening their platform and preparing for the chance to try again.

Outside of Quebec, the question has always been *why*? Why separate from the protection of Canada's umbrella? Separatism seems counter-intuitive. Economically it doesn't make sense; the common business language across the world is English, whereas Quebec is pushing for French dominance, even going so far as trying to decree that all communications into and out of any office – whether by email, phone or fax – must be in French, regardless of the language of the correspondent. Bill 101, which requires that French words are the most prominent on any sign, Bill 178 and the recent Bill 14 are good indicators of this movement towards English suppression.

The language barrier won't be the only thing making life difficult if Quebec were to gain independence. Economically, the federal government funds quite a few projects within each province and, if Quebec succeeds in separating, the provincial government will have to take on those debts – pension plan, employment insurance, social programs. Even historical landmarks in la belle province are kept pristine by the men and woman in Ottawa. So why this desire to sever itself from the federal dime? Sovereignty and separation have more to do with cultural identity than anything else. Since Canada was first discovered, the French versus English battle has been a not-so-silent struggle. For the majority of Canadians, it no longer exists, but for Quebec residents, it never ends.

Vive le Québec libre

Sovereignty as a movement started in the 1820s, when Quebec Nationalists first emerged. It has been kept alive by those people who feel strongly that their

See **Not at home** *on page 2*

'Open the Door' event deplores Canada's new refugee laws

Ron Rupke

God's people must care deeply about the plight of displaced prsons and refugees, according to biblical scholar Sylvia Keesmaat. As she began a recent event sponsored by the Canadian Sanctuary Network in Lindsay, Ontario, Dr. Keesmaat remarked that the biblical story is one of constant displacement. From Abraham, Jacob, Naomi and Ruth, to Mary and Joseph and the infant Jesus – "Who will take them in, who will share hospitality with them?"

The evening continued with a video presentation of a Roma couple who left Budapest, Hungary and arrived in Canada in 2000 claiming refugee status. They tried to settle in the town of St. Catharines, Ontario, where they were able to find work almost immediately, and support

Should churches offer sanctuary?

See **Refugee laws** *on page 2*

Not at home *continued*

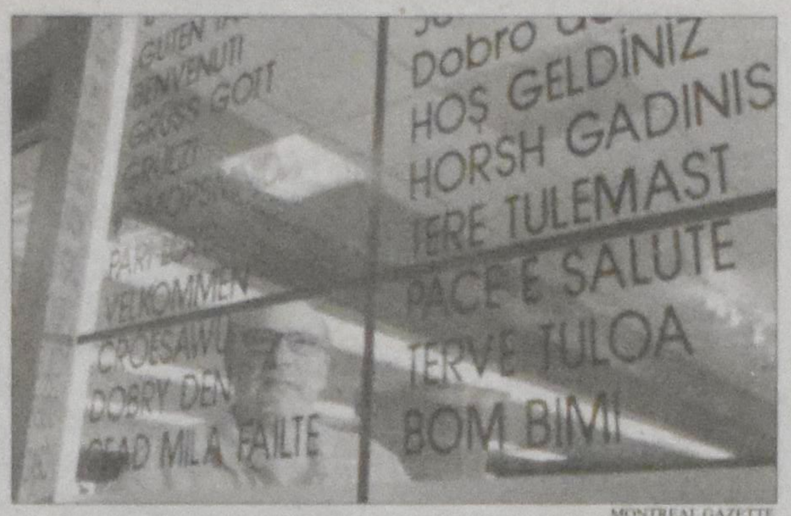
culture and their way of life are threatened by the English regime. During the Quiet Revolution of the 50s and 60s, the PQ was founded, and it flourished. Its goals were for an independent and social democracy for Quebec. In 1974, Bill 22 was passed – the Official Language Act – which made French the sole language for the province. 1980 saw the first referendum, and 40.44 percent of the population wanted to separate. The second referendum, in 1995, was even closer – 49.44 percent voted "yes" to separation. Now, under the rule of Pauline Marois and the PQ's minority government, we may soon see the third referendum. And this one might stick.

That still doesn't answer why some Québécois feel so alienated from Canada. Gerard Bouchard, a Quebec historian, sociologist and writer, explains that "Francophones consider themselves a fragile and colonized minority, despite forming the majority of Quebec population . . . they find it difficult to accept other ethnic groups as being Quebecers." He believes that an independent Quebec would give Québécois the confidence to act more generously to incorporate all willing ethnic communities into Quebec as a whole.

It's the classic "the bully is actually afraid of you" concept. All of these motions and actions to divide from the English Federal government are rooted in the fear that their culture – the Québécois identity – will be removed with their language.

A nation of immigrants

But this fear isn't evident outside of Quebec. Everyone comes from varied backgrounds. Our identity isn't defined by our location; it's defined by our ancestry. I grew up in small town Ontario. Even after 10 years of living in Montreal, I don't feel like a Quebecker. But I also don't consider myself an Ontarian. If I had to pinpoint my nationality it would be Canadian or, more specifically, second-generation Dutch-Canadian. Many of my Anglophone friends feel the same way; those with one type of ancestry define their nationality first by the homeland of their parents or grandparents, then by their country. Only after that do we get into the specifics of province.



MONTREAL GAZETTE

His front window welcomes you in 35 languages, which violates Bill 101 saying French must be prominent.

Québécois are different. During the Quiet Revolution in the 50s and 60s, the term Québécois replaced French-Canadian as an expression of culture and national identity.

The Federal government has been trying to find a solution, to reach a compromise. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau worked to increase the French-speaking roles within the Federal government in an effort to promote a unified Canadian identity. 1987 brought us Brian Mulroney and the Meech Lake Accord, which recognized Quebec as a distinct society within Canada. It eventually crumbled as other provinces sought to have their cultures recognized as well. Sovereignty in this province grew in popularity as a result. Then Quebec officially became a nation within Canada – a motion passed on November 27, 2006 under the eye of Stephen Harper. Harper later stated that the motion's definition of Québécois relies on personal decisions to self-identify as Québécois, and therefore is a personal choice. Unfortunately, none of these movements have dispersed the idea that it is either Federal rule, with the eventual disappearance of Quebec culture, or sovereignty.

There are different cultures evident in every Canadian neighbourhood. The Asian family down the street has a decor and customs that differs from South African or Swedish families. Each family unit has its own quirks and habits, based on the culture of its ancestors. All of us speak English to each other. Any other language is reserved for the homestead.

In Quebec, each house has the same quirks, the same culture. They are not Dutch-French-Canadians. They are Québécois. They feel that their culture is being slowly pushed out by the English-Canadians. They're fighting for their right to live as they see fit. For the right to control their own future, to allow their children to carry on the traditions they've set forth. Our ancestors came to Canada knowing that their way of life would change. The French culture started this country and they don't believe they should be expected to change.

But maybe, just maybe, they could just go about it in a better way.

Lisa Hoekstra is a freelance writer based in Montreal, Quebec. Her childhood love of reading developed into a passion for writing that has filled her life and provided her with an outlet for her imagination.

Refugee laws *continued*

themselves. However, their claim to refugee status was rejected and they were deported back to Budapest. In Hungary, the woman was able to find work, but her husband was not. He answered job advertisements and showed up for interviews, but employers refused to hire him when they met him. The man claimed that his dark skin colour was the obvious reason why no one would hire him. Moreover, the couple also faced serious harassment from a neo-Nazi group called the Jobbick Party. This group, which has managed to elect members to the Hungarian Parliament, compares the Roma people in Hungary to pesky mosquitoes.

New criteria

Two staff members from the New Canadians Centre in nearby Peterborough gave examples of their experience with refugee claimants. Michael VanDerHerberg told a real life story of a single mother refugee from Ecuador, who found work cleaning an insurance office, advanced to office work and then became an insurance broker, and a home owner through the Habitat for Humanity program. He criticized the recent changes in Canada's refugee laws as being more about money than about welcoming the stranger. Tamara Hoogerdyk explained the effects of the recent Balanced Refugee Reform Act and Bill C-31, enacted in December 2012. The new law provides a different process for refugee claimants from designated "safe" countries including Mexico, Hungary and the Czech Republic. Such refugee claimants are no longer eligible for immediate health care benefits, and they must establish their "basis for claim" within 45 days of their arrival. She remarked that the effects of the new acts are already evident in a reduced number of claimants to refugee status in Canada.

Places of refuge

A Jesuit father from Toronto's Romero House was the final speaker of the evening. J. Santiago Rodriguez, SJ, introduced himself as someone who originally came to

Mikhail Lennikov has lived in Vancouver's First Lutheran church for three years. Five churches in Canada are currently in "sanctuary situations."

Canada as a refugee claimant from Columbia. He discussed the concept of "sanctuary," a process by which a Christian community offers shelter to persons who have no legal status in Canada and are subject to deportation. He traced the concept back to the Old Testament concept of cities of refuge, outlined in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. In Constantine Europe, bishops and monks would sometimes offer shelter to the unjustly accused. In more recent history, abolitionists offered refuge to runaway slaves, and various people gave refuge to Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe during the Second World War era. In response to questions from the audience, he explained that the tradition of providing sanctuary within a church building has no basis in law, but rather has a long tradition in history which has been mostly respected. He said that currently there are five sanctuary situations in Canada, three of them in Anglican Churches.

Father Roriguez criticized the recent amendments to Canada's refugee laws as motivated by selfishness. "We want Canada to have a just and compassionate policy for

CATHOLIC REGISTER

Roma Centre of Toronto settlement worker Gyongyi with Agnes Raduly, and a painting that illustrates Roma persecution.

refugees. Denying health care benefits to refugee claimants is a direct contradiction to the right to life and the security of the person which are guaranteed by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Forty-five days is not enough time for a refugee claimant to prepare a case, and inconsistency of paperwork can mean rejection of a claim," he stated. "It is very difficult for a traumatized person to quickly tell their story in a way that meets the refugee claimant requirements."

As I left the meeting, I reflected on the reality of living as a citizen of two kingdoms. As a Canadian, I expect my government to use Canada's resources for the benefit of citizens first, and to protect the immigration system from the potential of fraudulent refugee claims. As a Christian and a citizen of the Kingdom of God, I want to offer to all the gracious welcome that God has given me. Where the two kingdoms seem to be in conflict, I thank God for sanctuary.

Ron Rupke is a freelance writer living in Cobourg, Ont.

Column/News

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

Home is the hardest word

Every time I try to define "home," it gets away from me. It's a slippery word.

Is "home" a place? Is it the four walls and the furniture of the house you're living in right now? Or is it the feeling you get when you walk into your house, knowing that everything inside is yours, and where you need it to be? Is it the feeling you get when you're sitting on your couch, reading an old book, and you look up and see the painting on the wall and the light illuminating everything just so, and your kids playing noisily in the next room? Is home the contentment of having a place that is yours, alone?

Maybe.

But isn't home also a time? When you think of home, some small part of you always thinks back to your childhood home. To the place you grew up. You think back to the smell of the soup your mom made on Sundays. You can almost feel the rough drapes in the old living room on your skin. You remember how, when you climbed it, the bark from the tree in the backyard got stuck under your fingernails. You can just about taste the smell of the grease and rust on your old bike in the garage. And when you do all of that, home becomes a time – a beautiful, simpler, more innocent time when others watched out for you, and your only job was to drink in all the colours and scents of the world and to grow, as best you could, inside and out.

Or is it?

Isn't home a verb? Because home is also the action of returning somewhere safe. A homing pigeon returns to its roost. A homing beacon allows searchers to bring stranded people back to shore. The home key on your keyboard takes you back to the top of the page where you started. Home is the act of turning back, or returning, to the last place where you knew – beyond a doubt – that nothing bad could happen to you. And for that reason home is always moving, always in flux, always relative to where you find yourself now, if you're not at home.

Such a slippery word.

Park bench or planet

Because home can be broader than just one place, too. The word "home" comes from the old English word "ham," which could mean either a single house or an entire village. This is why we speak of our "home town," or "our home and native land." So the notion of "home" can be as narrow as four walls and a bed, or as broad as 10 provinces and three territories. It can be a park bench or a planet, depending on your perspective.

Or it might not be any of those things.

Maybe home is a person. Maybe home is breathing your husband of 25 years in, face to face, every night. Perhaps it is the intimate knowledge of his rugged geography of lines, moles, stubble and scars. Or else home is your father as you remember him from your childhood. From when you were pushing around the soft, raised veins standing out on the backs of his hands. Or home is the smell of your mother's perfume, clinging to the white coat she wore to church that morning. Home is your child's coarse mop of hair under your hand as you rub his head during his nighttime prayers. Or perhaps, as your fingers lock and intertwine with hers for the first time, maybe home is the sensation of your heart coming back to you, returning after an absence, lured back by new love. It is trusting enough to open up again – just as it first did when you were a child, yourself – and drinking in all the colours and scents of the world like it was the first time.

Some part of you always thinks of home as the place you grew up.

Where grace reigns

The Bible isn't terribly clear on the word, either.

In the fifty-odd mentions of the word "home" in the bible, the word is mostly used interchangeably with "house." But there is one biblical story that I think truly captures all the senses of the word "home" – even though the word itself is never even mentioned.

In Luke we read of a son, who takes his inheritance and leaves his father and brother to find his way in the world. He feels as though his happiness – his home – lies out there, somewhere. But after squandering his fortune and losing his way, he turns back to see that home is that place he left behind. That place where he grew up and was loved. Home was his old country, his father's love, his grumbling brother. And he takes action – he goes back to that place of safety and, when he does – his father comes running down the road towards him, robes flying, arms open, to accept him back again.

That, to me, comes closest to defining that slippery, slippery word.

Home is the place where grace reigns. It is where we are loved unconditionally and forgiven irrevocably. It is so hard to define because it's not really an earthy concept at all – it's a heavenly one. And on this side of our true home, all other definitions of home, all other uses of the word are insufficient to capture the mystery and the truth of our one, heavenly home.

But we do know this for certain: one day, we will find ourselves home. It is our life's task and our purpose. As TS Eliot wrote:

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

'Homeless Jesus' sculpture finds a home

A visual sermon, sculptor says.

Angela Reitsma Bick

Ironically, the latest creation of Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz, depicting Jesus as a homeless man, could barely find a home itself. The bronze sculpture weighs over 1,000 pounds and – at seven feet long – is the size of a regular park bench, with the addition of a permanent, life-sized bronze person huddled under a blanket. Gaping nail wounds on exposed bare feet reveal that this represents the Saviour of the world, with literally no place to lay his head (Luke 9:58). The sculptor calls *Jesus the Homeless* a visual sermon, citing Jesus' pattern in the Gospels of identifying with the marginalized as his artistic inspiration.

Schmalz, a Roman Catholic, first offered the statue to two prominent Catholic churches. But St. Michael's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Toronto and St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York rejected *Jesus the Homeless*, after initially expressing interest in it. Religion News Service reports that "archdiocese higher-ups . . . nixed the plans." The installment finally found an official home in front of Regis College at the University of Toronto, the Jesuit seminary.

Schmalz hopes the work makes viewers consider how contemporary urban life dehumanizes those who are homeless.

"If Jesus was watching the streets today," he says, "I think he would want himself represented as one of the most marginalized. That's what he said in the Gospels." "Perhaps Schmalz's experience of finding a home for the sculpture," Pastor Mike Borgert of First Christian Reformed Church of Barrie, Ont. points out, "should serve as a reminder to us to be careful to welcome Jesus, especially as he takes on flesh in the poor and oppressed we encounter" (Matt. 25:31-46).

The artwork includes space for one person to sit at Jesus' feet, which Schmaltz describes as an uncomfortable spot.

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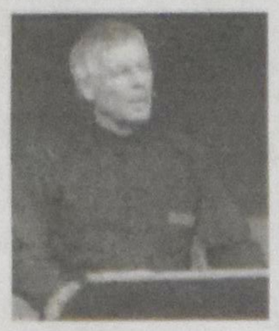
Editorials

We believe. Help our unbelief.



James C. Dekker

I still cannot comprehend these facts a month after it all began.

On May 6, Tim Bosma of Ancaster, Ontario, lifelong member of Ancaster CRC, took a test drive in his seven-year old Dodge pickup. With him were two young men who saw the ad, called Tim and drove to his rural home. Young men do this all the time. Tim told his wife Sharlene he'd be back soon. But Tim did not return. A week later, the Hamilton Police announced that Tim's burned body had been found.

On May 22 Tim's astonishingly courageous family held a public memorial in the hall where Tim and Sharlene had celebrated their wedding three years ago. At least 1,500 people attended, many others being turned away. Two weeks earlier no one, certainly not Tim's family, could have dreamed of attending that service.

All that has been playing in my head like a wicked song I can't turn off. I don't recall any event, pleasant or dreadful, ever before churning for so long. I can hardly begin to imagine the turmoil of Tim's friends and family.

My response is not unique. Thousands of people far from Tim's circles remain haunted by this cruel jumble of memories and feelings. Extensive and remarkably sensitive media coverage of his terrible ordeal has only now faded from print, radio and television news.

Why does this young man's death and his family's grief make such a deep impact on so many who never knew Tim? Perhaps because, as Tim's widow Sharlene so poignantly put it at the memorial, Tim was so ordinary. Yet after unspeakable cruelty ended his life and shattered his wife and two-year-old daughter's lives without warning or sense, every ordinary person who has heard about this surely thinks: "That could be my husband, son, brother, cousin, uncle, friend – or me."

Everybody, Christian believer or not, who has heard of Tim is now tied to the Bosmas. Tim's memorial service was live-streamed, turning a family and church community event into a far-reaching, heart-rending public lament that honestly mourned Tim, yet also gave expression to somber hope. Still we wonder, "How can Tim's family and community even begin to cope with such madness?"

Pop psychology tells us, "one step at a time, one day at a time." That is meaningless, because no one knows where that first step will start. Regardless, the minds and hearts of desperate people, many without spiritual convictions or religious habits, turn to God (or gods) asking the unanswerable "Why?"

So that is where we start, because that question links us in a universal human community to which we belong whether we realize that or not. That common link prodded faith communities all over the world (U.S.A, Australia, The Netherlands and more) to do what comes naturally to confused and spiritually wrung out people: they hold sober times of prayer and invite *everyone*.

Communal lament

Without claiming special grief, our congregation, Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, was reeling perhaps a little more than most after Tim's death; his sister Michelle and family are long-time members. I was honoured to baptize three of Michelle and Doug's four children. Both extended families attended the baptisms. I surely met Tim on those occasions, but do not remember exactly.

For those elemental reasons our staff obeyed what I take as the Holy Spirit's urging to hold a simple prayer vigil after hearing of Tim's death. We decided to develop a service of lament. It did not take long to choose Psalm 88, the most desolate song in the Bible, as the service theme. We had no idea who would attend, though we knew why anyone would: we all needed an opportunity to gather in our bewilderment and sadness.

Somehow our city newspaper had learned that Tim's sister was a member. Karena Walter, St. Catharines *Standard* reporter, called the church, saying "our whole newsroom is stunned. We wonder what can we do to help? Is your church *doing* anything?" I told her about the service. Two hours later she posted an article on the paper's website highlighting the service, inviting the community.

The next evening, around 300 people entered the sanctuary somberly, expectantly, but for what no one really knew. Michelle, Doug and their two oldest daughters attended, bravely sitting in the front row, attention riveted, tears flowing often. Several prayers by Rich Loerop, a pastor colleague, gave opportunity for reflection and silence. A teacher from the local Christian school read three stanzas from "A Communal Lament" (*Psalter Hymnal*, #576). Our gifted pianist led the haunting "Blessed Be Your Name" (Matt Redmond), evoking from the congregation not only sadness, but also a moving, though mournful celebration of Tim's life lived – and ended – in God's mysterious embrace.

Foolish for God

My meditation on Psalm 88 was one of the few times I have spoken without notes. Psalm 88 is so utterly bereft of hope. The writer accuses God of just not being around when it counts; finally claiming "the darkness is my closest friend." Yet his words also bespeak such an intimate relationship with this absent God that he prays despite his accusation of divine absence.

That is faith – being foolish for God, believing when that seems the craziest response. That is the faith that sustains Sharlene and Tim's family for now. That is the faith that moved Tim's sister Michelle to declare through tears at the memorial that "this will not break up our family." That is the faith that strengthened the Bosmas' pastor, John Veenstra, to attend Sharlene and the Bosmas so honestly and faithfully. That is the faith that prodded Jen Slocum, a singer-songwriter from Hamilton, now living in Alabama, to write "Prayer for the Broken Heart" for Sharlene.

So, finally, to try to answer Karena Walter's question, "Is your church *doing* anything?" the only response I – and more churches and people than I could ever count – can give is this: "We're praying and believing despite doubt, anger and suffering." And that's the way it's going to be until Jesus returns.

James C. Dekker is pastor of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines where family of Tim Bosma are members. This originally appeared as a post on the CRCNA's Network (www.crcna.org/network).

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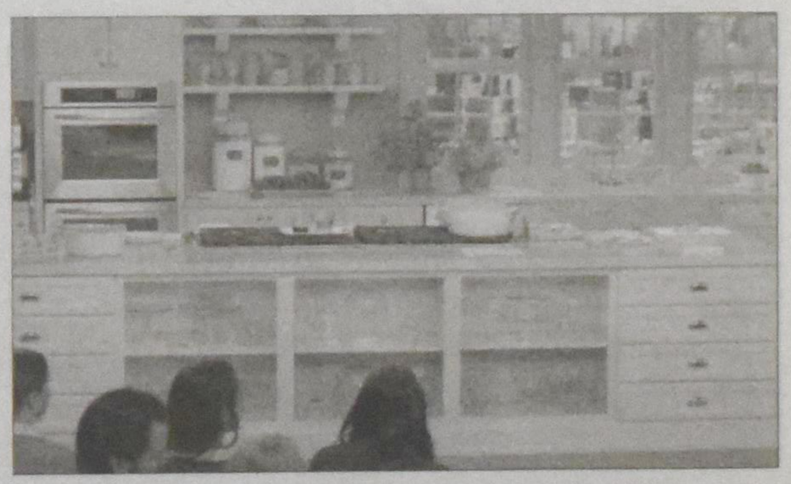
Is that supper or a science experiment?

Angela Reitsma Bick

I invited Martha Stewart over for lunch. She smiled at the tulips but raised her eyebrows at the scuffed table and nearly fainted when she peeked under the kitchen sink. I nudged a stray Cheerio under the fridge and stirred the soup nervously. Would she notice that I had subbed in yoghurt for sour cream?

Home is intimately linked with food; home-made a high compliment. The simplest meals – porridge with raisins and cinnamon, toast with sliced tomatoes, curried chicken over rice – taste that little bit better when they're prepared by those who love you and know just what you like. Food brings people together in way that nothing else does. It strengthens families, communities and the body of Christ when bread is broken together.

Martha threatens all that. She takes something straightforward and makes it complicated. With her around, my kitchen seems too small to entertain guests and the dining room too plain. Maybe I'd better wait until we organize the front closet. After all, I'm not the world's greatest housekeeper. Me vacuuming is rare enough that the kids usually ask, "Who's coming over?" And once, I was babysitting a two-year-old who refused to pee in our toilet because it was "too yirty." She had the cutest lisp and, apparently, a way cleaner bathroom than we do. When even toddlers take



Seduced by the illusion of culinary perfection.

note, you have to admit that's a lot of pressure.

The Food Network has turned cooking into performance. Done by experts. The artistically displayed meals on magazine covers contradict their own claims to be fast and easy to prepare. For these and a hundred other reasons (cost and calories high on the list), "guilt and anxiety are too frequently our dining partners," Rachel Marie Stone describes in her counter-cultural debut book *Eat with Joy: Redeeming God's Gift of Food* (Intervarsity Press, 2013).

Bread of life

No one person can handle these impossibly high standards – that food be fresh, beautiful, local, organic, home-

Letters

The tie that binds

Chris Schievink

This title will elicit a sound of recognition from Christian Reformed clergy from one Canadian coast to the other. In fact, three things we ministers have in common today are that we have all signed the form of subscription, we have all asked questions recently about the pension plan, and we all know Eugene Peterson.

No, he is not the author of the popular paraphrase of the Bible. This Eugene Peterson is a man of no-fixed-address who travels from one end of Canada to the other, relying largely upon the kindnesses of CRC churches and their pastors. I dare say that more than 50 of you will recognize him immediately – and all of you, like me, are ordained in the Christian Reformed Church.

Eugene Peterson is one of the ties that bind us. He is like a brother that we adopted when we entered the ministry. Every now and then there will be a phone call or a knock on the door of the church office and there is Eugene – the Jack Kerouac of the CRC. In that moment, we are called to help him get from our door step to one the next town over.

Eugene is 55 years old – never married, no dependents – and has been on the road since his teens. He is one of a large group of siblings who, historically, have not gotten along that well. It is one of the reasons why he hit the road and has never settled down. He has made hitch-hiking as much his profession as getting to know people along the way. He prefers rural towns to urban areas because it is easier to find help if he gets stuck. He especially prefers rural towns with Christian Reformed Churches.

Paying attention

Eugene knows all about us. Struggling only with the pronunciation of a few, he name-drops ministers who serve in the Maritimes, southern Ontario, over Lake Superior (traveling the long way to respect the national divide), in the Prairies, and "out West." The information we look up in the CRC Yearbook, he has compiled for memory simply by visiting the towns, and the churches, and paying particular attention to the pastors. Talking with Eugene is like being on Facebook for CRC ministers, except that the status updates might be a little outdated. For the most part, he knows *who* is *where*, and *who* came from *where*, and *where he or she was before that*. He knows as many in my seminary graduating class as I can name off the top of my head.

The other Eugene Peterson – the Jack Kerouac of the CRC.

"Why the CRC?" I asked him, curious what reason he has to look for the familiar cross and triangle.

"Because you are generous in spirit and because the ministers are down to earth," he told me. I understand the *generous* part; that is a reputation you get when you give. But what about being *down to earth*? I suspect what Eugene means is we don't wear our clerical collars too tightly. Within the denominational personality there is a desire to be relational and relevant.

Thankfully, Eugene is more like our adopted brother than our auditor. After all, *he knows all about us*. He can tell you *how* he was treated, by *whom* and *in which church*. In his visits, he observes not only the movement of ministers but also the drop-out rate. In wondering why some leave the ministry, he comes to a simplistic conclusion: "the congregation gave him the boot." This affects Eugene as much as it does all of us. But mostly he reflects on his travels through the CRC by noting our "generosity and kindness."

I am grateful for Eugene. He reminds me that I'm part of something bigger. I don't know my colleagues in ministry who serve in rural towns dotting Canada's vast geography – but Eugene Peterson does, and I know him – *that's neat*! There are many things that bind us together – our confession, our care, our generosity, our shared personality – and a relationship with a familiar stranger.

Chris Schievink is pastor of Calvary CRC in Chatham. If you've met the other Eugene Peterson, email editor@christiancourier.ca with your story.

Is that supper *continued*

made, nutritious, tasty and served in an immaculate setting. There's an army of support staff who keep Martha Stewart going, just as the original Martha (of Bethany) wanted Mary to join her in the kitchen.

When she re-enacted the story to us after church, our daughter made her finger-puppet Martha whine to Jesus: "Mary's not *helping* me set the table!" (If a finger could stomp its foot, this Martha would have.)

Jesus poked his cardboard head above the sofa.

"Don't worry about it," he paraphrased. "Just stay with me." Which is not a bad exegesis, for a five-year-old.

"'Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing,'" *The Message* translates. "'Only one thing is essential, and Mary has chosen it'" (Luke 10:3).

Come to the table

Eat with Joy works through many of the hang-ups we have around food – eating too much, too little, not sharing, not paying attention. "Food is a sign of God's love," Stone says, "and there is no room for fear in love, for love casts out fear" (34). That includes being scared of trans fat or of criticism, for my less-than-perfect pizza crust or mismatched table settings.

I'm going to stop apologizing for the state of our house. I will not pretend that three children sit quietly in glisteningly clean rooms while I whip up a five-course meal. It's time to kick Martha out of the kitchen – Stewart, and the Martha parts of me. "The grandest seduction of all is the myth that doing everything better gets us where we want to be," Shauna Niequist shares in her memoir *Bittersweet*. It really doesn't. Trying to *do everything better* when it comes to cooking and company leaves me stressed and strung out.

I know how to make food that people like – blueberry muffins, waffles and whipping cream, chicken chili with white beans and cilantro. It's enough. Sharing a meal with "joyful attentiveness can elevate food from mere fuel – which it never really is anyway – to a celebration of creation and what it means to be human" (*Eat With Joy*, 139).

I know how to practise hospitality (Rom. 12:13), and I'm thankful that Paul used the verb *practise*.

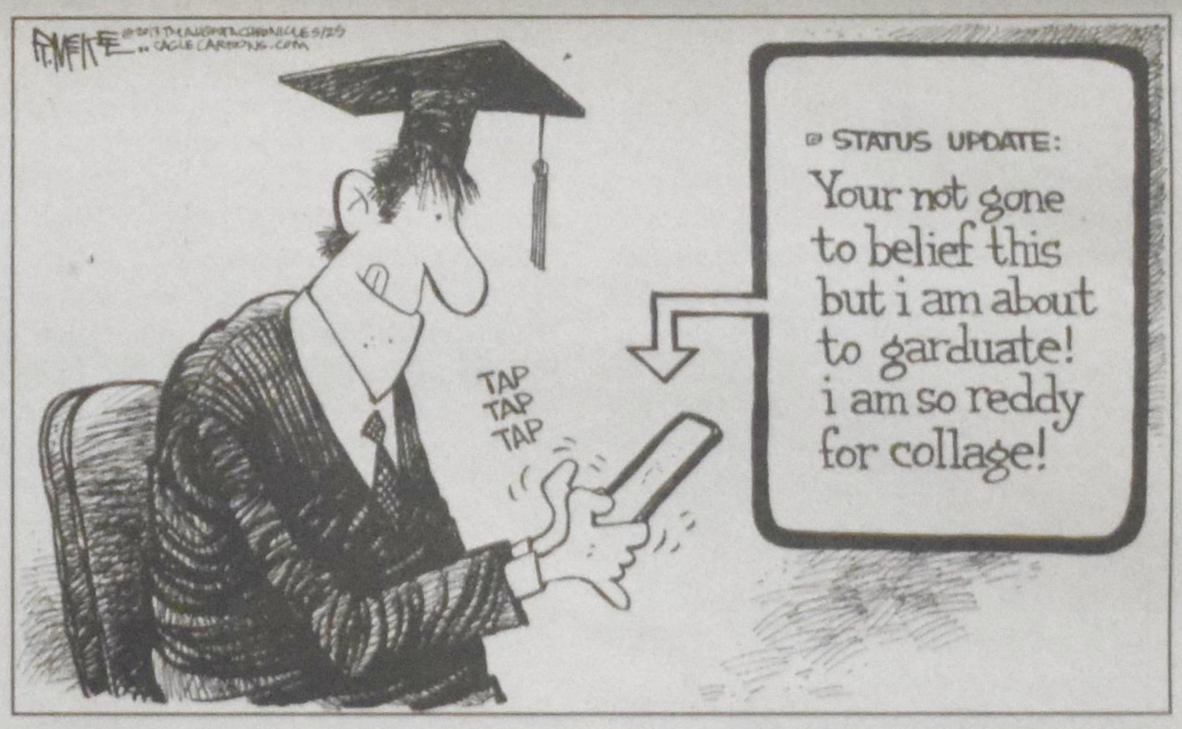
I know how to laugh when my daughter peers into a bowl on the counter and asks with real curiosity, "Is that supper or a science experiment?"

Darling, it could go either way.

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of CC. *Her kids love nothing better than hopping up on the counter to help and to snoop.*

Anglican prayer

For food in a world where many walk in hunger;
For faith in a world where many walk in fear;
For friends in a world where many walk alone;
We give you thanks, O Lord. *Amen.*



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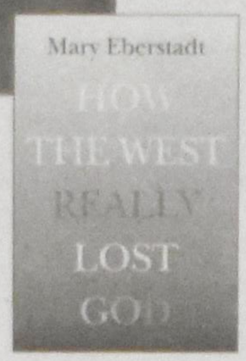
Scholar: Western culture 'lost God' through demise of the family

Fractured families are linked to increased secularization, Eberstadt argues.



WASHINGTON D.C. (CNA/EWTN News) – Scholar Mary Eberstadt says that most theories of secularization do not take into account the role of the family in religious practice. But the family's demise is critically linked to an increasingly secular West. Eberstadt is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

"The reasons commonly offered for secularization don't hold up when you scrutinize them," she says. "This means that modern secular sociology has gotten a pretty big thing wrong, and it's gotten it wrong because it has ignored the role of the family and what motivates people to go to church."

She notes that "the conventional story line" often assumes secularization is a natural effect of a variety of forces such as modernization, the industrial revolution, education and material wealth. While these forces are important, Eberstadt concedes, none of them, by themselves, can explain the secularization of Western society.

She points to examples she cites in her recent book, *How the West Really Lost God.* The book asserts that despite the predictions of many proponents and scholars of secularization, religion is more prominent among the educated and wealthy. This seemingly disproves those who claim religion is mere superstition or comfort for the struggling, Eberstadt notes.

The book, released April 24 by Templeton Press, also shows how, after the industrial revolution, these two groups (the educated and wealthy) have been able to maintain the ability to retain family ties in ways that those who are less educated and facing financial misfortunes have not been able to. "When we see secularization, we're seeing something other than the fact that people got richer or the fact that people got more educated," Eberstadt emphasized.

'Hidden, critical player'

Instead, she aims to "forth an alternative theory:" that the "family has been a hidden and critical player all along" in both the success and decline of religious observance. "In times of family decline you see a religious decline; in times of family prosperity you see religious prosperity," Eberstadt said of her research. And "the fracturing of the modern family and the atomization of the modern family have a lot to do with the secularization of society."

To those wishing to reverse the trends of secularization, she emphasizes, "the first thing we need to do is understand what exactly is going on. It's not a hopeless situation." Eberstadt maintains that secularization is not an inevitable effect of modernization, as many claim. She suggests that those wishing to challenge the trend of declining religious observance look at "what makes it easier to have families," noting, in particular, ways of supporting young families in times of need, such as "pro-bono marital counseling" and increased child support within communities.

Eberstadt also stresses that "religious believers benefit society," and that it is "shortsighted" to attempt to marginalize and stigmatize religious practice. "People who have a creed that tells them to take care of poor and sick people are more likely to do that," Eberstadt says, noting sociological trends such as a "charity gap" between religious and nonreligious persons, as well as "very little private donation" in irreligious countries. "Religious practice helps everybody in the public," she says. "These are people who are actually giving back in the public square a meaningful way."

Crowd attacks Pakistani village; 1,500 Christians flee

CHAK, Pakistan (CCO/Fides) – Residents of the Muslim village of "Chak 30" attacked the Christian village of "Chak 31" in the Pakistani province of Punjab after local Christians were accused of being disrespectful towards Islam.

The incident began when Muslims in Chak 30 accused Christian grocery store owner Asher Yaqoob and his Christian customers of having disrespect towards Islam, which incited faithful Muslims of the nearby Chak 30.

When the Christians called the police, instead of protecting them, a police officer became the head of a crowd of 60 Muslims who began to beat Christians they encountered and destroyed homes and shops.

An estimated 1,500 Christians fled their village, but 20 Christians were detained and arrested. One Muslim was killed in the clash.

In a separate incident, a Muslim murdered a 14-year-old Catholic boy in Khushpur, the Catholic village sometimes known as the "Vatican of Pakistan." The boy's father and brother were also injured in the attack, which was related to a land dispute.

The Spirit of God on university campuses

Campus ministers from Canada and the U.S.

Andy Crouch on "excavating creation's abundance."

Two image-bearers in "The Banjo Lesson."

Jenica Groot-Nibbelink

Henry Ossawa Tanner's famous painting, *The Banjo Lesson*, provides a beautiful image of human flourishing and the Christian vocation: an elderly man sits with a young boy on his lap, his hands gently supporting the banjo as the boy plucks its strings. As he teaches the boy to play, the two image-bearers participate in the human vocation to create beauty and flourish.

Tanner's painting was one of many images used by Andy Crouch to illustrate our calling to participate in God's Kingdom as restored image-bearers. Crouch, former Harvard campus minister and author, spoke to a group of around 100 campus ministers, student leaders and community members at this year's Christian Reformed Campus Ministry Association (CRCMA) conference, May 7-9 at Crieff Hills Conference Centre. Using a wide variety of illustrations from world-class journalists, musicians, poets, and artists, Crouch provocatively challenged attendees to see the Christian and human vocation as "excavating [the] abundance" built into creation.

Every year CRCMA in partnership with Christian Reformed Home Missions (CRHM) organizes a conference to provide a much needed space of reflection, encouragement and inspiration. We gather as strangers but leave as friends empowered to be hosts of Christ's love on our university campuses once more. We gather with a desire to slow down, reflect, and contemplate the Spirit of God as it moves over our campuses. This year's conference was hosted by Guelph Campus Ministry.

Why campus ministry?

In a post-Christian world, campus ministers and their students are strangers in a strange land; we are guests of the public university. But whether living in the centre or peripheries of our campuses, we still participate in shaping our university culture. In the midst of Christian disengagement from North American culture, the CRC invests in campus ministry because it holds that God calls us to work for God's Kingdom in all things and in the here and now. The God who comes to us as the Word Made Flesh scandalously calls all of us to embody Christ in the particularity of our lives. As we gathered, worshipped and prayed, we wrestled and dreamed together about the Christian vocation: What does it mean to participate in culture as student and Christian? How do we rightly seek and use power to help orient our campuses and, by extension, our world toward shalom?

For Guelph Campus Ministry student leader, Anna Aukema, the conference and Crouch's lectures inspired her to think of campus ministry as a vehicle for wider human flourishing: "I will really take back with me the idea of 'flourishing' and how the power of campus ministry is in the degree to which it can restore the image of God and bring flourishing life to the various corners of campus." But the conference inspired her to move beyond the boundaries of her campus too. Anna wants to "share the language of God in Genesis which speaks of flourishing with others as we seek to create and restore in our communities." As Anna's words indicate, we experienced glory in our midst at this conference! May all of you who work and live in your particular places see and embody Christ who, as described by Gerard Manley Hopkins, plays "in ten thousand places / lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his / to the Father through the features of men's face."

Jenica Groot-Nibbelink is Assistant Chaplain at the Kuyper Centre at the University of Western Ontario.

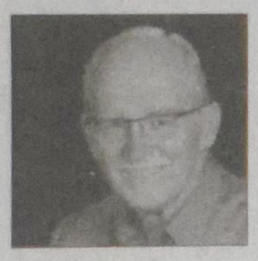
News

CRC among signers of letter to Harper re: Middle East conflict

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – The Christian Reformed Church in Canada has joined some 20 other churches in signing a letter calling on the Government of Canada to help stop the ongoing bloodshed in the Middle East.

Written and distributed by the Canadian Council of Churches, the letter addressed the ongoing deadly conflicts causing in countries across the Middle East. Although the letter's focus was on the widespread destruction, it served a "significant, ecumenical purpose," said the signers.

"This is a positive letter and strong voice for justice and a positive reflection of Christian unity," asserted Ben Vandezande, interim director of the CRC's Canadian Ministries, who signed the letter on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church.



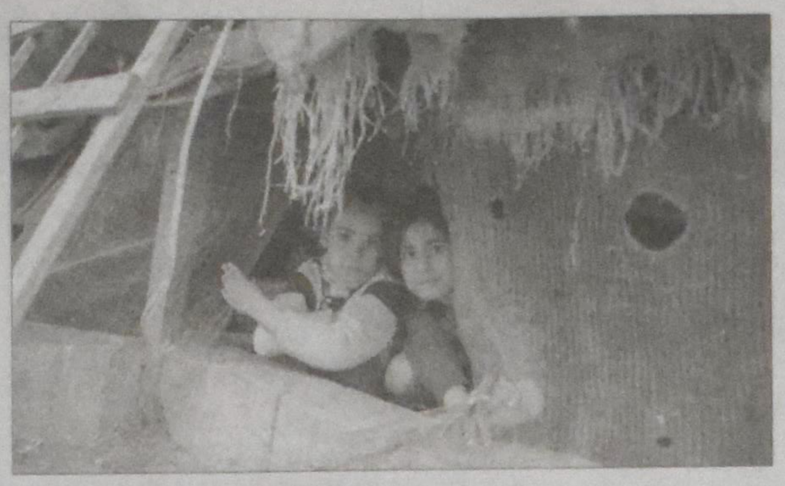
Vandezande

In a press release, Peter Noteboom, deputy general secretary of Canadian Council of Churches said that all 24 of its 24 member-churches endorsed the letter. As it turned out, he said, the governing board of the Council of Churches was to meet the same week with representatives of the government and political parties, and intended to speak to them about the letter.

Complicated mess

Focusing on multiple crises in the Middle East, the letter was addressed to Prime Minister Harper.

Among other things, it said, "With heavy hearts, we note the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria, its need for international support and cooperation throughout its territory, the threats there to Christian churches and schools, and the recent abduction of church leaders; the uncertainty and turmoil with democratic transitions in Egypt; the unresolved decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the rising tensions and stresses within and between various countries in the region."



"With heavy hearts, we note the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria."

The letter expressed concern "for the safety and security of all the people in the region but in particular, the weak, vulnerable and powerless." It said "the spread of sectarian violence puts all generations throughout the region at risk, and are a menace to the hopes and dreams of the younger generations."

The ecclesiastical signers of the letter want Harper to "respond robustly and generously to the pressures and tensions experienced by both displaced peoples and by the host countries in the region that provide refuge; to lead in the protection of human rights with special attention to the rights of children, women and minority groups; to hold firm to the obligation for all state and non-state actors to respect international law, particularly in situations of armed conflict; and to assist us in our efforts as churches to work with local peacemakers and providers of humanitarian assistance in the region."

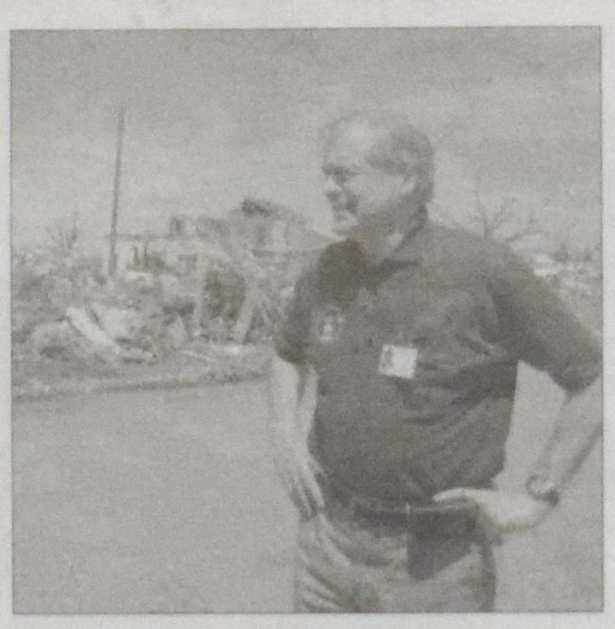
World Renew responding to Oklahoma tornado

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich./BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – In the immediate aftermath of the devastating two-mile-wide tornado that hit Moore, Oklahoma, on May 20, World Renew began to respond, planning how it would help the many victims.

World Renew, formerly the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, is the CRC's disaster relief and development agency. The agency's tornado relief will be conducted in partnership with Reformed Church World Service, its counterpart in the Reformed Church in America (RCA).

"Our hearts break with all those who have experienced such painful loss. Every severe storm is hurtful to those who experience it, but this one is especially tragic because of the magnitude of the destruction and the number of lives lost – especially those of school children," said Bill Adams, World Renew director of Disaster Response Services. "Yet we know that our God is bigger than even this storm. We want to bring some of his hope to the people in Oklahoma."

World Renew regional managers Don and Ardy Pranger were already at work responding to the tornadoes that had struck Texas the week before when they heard about the Oklahoma City-area tornado. They quickly got in touch with government officials and others in Oklahoma to evaluate how the World Renew could best respond.



World Renew director of Disaster Response Services surveys the tornado damage.

Based on those conversations, the agency sent two "early response coordinators," Rich and Pat Grasman, to Moore to help with "spiritual care and early assessment," and to plan for cleanup and long-term recovery efforts.

Standing by survivors for the long-term

World Renew and Reformed Church World Service also expect to stand by disaster survivors for the long-term, repairing and rebuilding homes for the elderly, the disabled and those who lack insurance or the ability to do repairs on their own.

This will be carried out by some of the more than 3,000 short- and long-term volunteers from the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of America and other denominations that World Renew has on its roster who are trained and ready to respond quickly when disasters strike.

"Amidst sometimes tumultuous weather, we can always count on the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening – even if it's hidden by cloud cover! This disaster has been horrific, but God is faithful. He will give us the strength that we need for the task at hand," said Adams.

To donate to this effort online go to **worldrenew.net.**
By phone, call:
1-800-730-3490 (Canada)
or 1-800-552-7972(US).
By mail, send cheques marked "Tornadoes 2013" to: World Renew Canada
3475 Mainway
PO Box 5070 Stn LCD
Burlington ON L7R 3Y8
Or to: World Renew US
2850 Kalamazoo Ave SE
Grand Rapids MI 49560

Canada-U.S. study

Suicide is 'contagious'; more students try it when exposed to schoolmates who died by suicide

Marian Van Til, *with files from Life News, Ottawa Citizen*

OTTAWA – Some say that suicide is "contagious," but it has been a controversial theory. Now, what's being called a ground-breaking study has found that there is truth to the contention.

Joint research by a University of Ottawa scholar and a scholar from Harvard University has found that teenagers who know of a fellow student who committed suicide are far more likely to themselves consider suicide. And that turns out to be true even if students didn't personally know the student who committed suicide, but had only heard of him or her.

The study was published late last month the Journal of Canadian Medical Association. Ian Colman, Canada research chair in mental health epidemiology at the University of Ottawa, conducted the study along with Sonja Swanson of the Harvard School of Public Health.

"It's solid evidence that supports a theory that has been around for a long time – that suicide contagion is real," says Colman. "I hope schools and school boards take it seriously."

The study examined responses from 22,000 12-to-17-year-olds in the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth which was conducted between 1998 and 2007. The teenagers were asked three questions: Has anyone in your school committed suicide? Do you personally know anyone who committed suicide? Have you yourself seriously considered suicide in the past year?

Colman

Colman told the *Ottawa Citizen* he was surprised at how many teenagers reported knowing of the suicide death of a schoolmate. By the time the teens were 16- or 17-years-old, almost a quarter of them knew of a schoolmate's suicide. One in five reported personally knowing someone who died of suicide.

'Clear and startling relationship'

The study discovered "a clear and startling relationship between having suicidal thoughts and attempts and being exposed to the suicide of a schoolmate." Even among kids as young as 12 and 13, the study revealed that 15.3 per cent of them who were "exposed" to suicide among school mates began thinking seriously about suicide. That's more than four times the number of those who were not exposed to suicide.

Colman asserted that, considering their young age, this suggests that "the real contagion effect is when an idea is introduced for the first time." And thinking of it frequently led to trying it: 7.5 per cent of the "exposed" 12- and 13-year-olds actually tried suicide, while only 1.7 per cent of those who were not exposed tried it. Colman noted a similar pattern of the "contagion effect" for the older teens.

Colman noted another disconcerting fact uncovered. The increased risk for teenagers after "exposure" to suicide lasts for at least two years. Coman explained that "psychological proximity" might explain the suicide "contagion effect." Teenagers are of similar age and share space, events and experiences closely at school.

Colman and Swanson's study did not examine how many teenagers actually follow through with their suicidal thoughts by committing suicide. But some other studies have concluded that for every death by suicide, 200 people have attempted it and 400 people have thought about it but didn't try it.

Colman says his and Swanson's research shows that more comprehensive strategies to combat suicide are needed, and providing resources after a suicide is extremely important, especially among young adolescents. A "whole-community approach" that supports young people in their daily lives – before any suicide occurs – will be the best preventative approach.

Columns

Cross-examining culture
Julia Stronks

Every one of us a fiddler

When I was 11 the movie *Fiddler on the Roof* was released. Many Christians in my Chicago CRC community said that because the main character Tevye spoke disrespectfully to God, this was a movie Christians should not see. Cal Seerveld, the father of my friend Anya, strongly disagreed. He told us that Christians should get involved in culture, not shy away from it. And he told us that through God's grace we could learn from faiths other than our own. Seerveld bundled up his family, included me in the group, and off we went through the streets of downtown Chicago to see *Fiddler*. I walked behind him a little, afraid that I might get smote down for challenging God in this way, but I also felt brave.

The movie was transforming for me. Jews and Christians under Czarist rule struggled to live together despite their differences. The gender challenges Tevye and his daughters faced as they confronted a changing culture made me think about boys, girls, friendship and marriage. The reluctance that some Russian leaders felt as they carried out orders to commit violence challenged my assumptions about evil. The conflict between those who believe we should cleave together against the outside and those who want to transform the world continues to reflect my own struggle and that of my students. And *Fiddler* was the first time that I felt kinship with people of a faith other than my own.

Does a changing culture threaten us, or can we adapt without losing our worldview?

The themes of *Fiddler* continue to interest me. What does it mean to transform a world when we also face discrimination from others in power? How does evil manifest itself and how ought we to respond when we confront it? Does a changing culture threaten us or can we adapt without losing our own worldview?

This column will focus on the challenges that all of us experience as we work to understand what it means to live under God's sovereignty in a broken but redeemed world. I'll be writing from my own perspective. And I hope that you will engage with these columns, challenging things I say and prompting new avenues of discussion as you consider society around you.

Two pluralisms

I am committed to a Reformed understanding of culture, informed by John Calvin and Abraham Kuyper. My thinking about social life has been influenced by Richard Mouw, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Miroslav Volf. My perspective on the law was shaped long ago by Bernie Zylstra at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, and my commitment to "doing justice" was fed by the articles Gerald VanderZande wrote for Citizens for Public Justice and *Christian Courier* over several decades.

These influences have taught me that though good theology is important, the most important Scriptural reference is the foundation of God's love for all of Creation. And because God loves us we in turn must love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and love our neighbors as ourselves. In addition, I have learned that "pluralism" is not a frightening word for Christians. If we are interested in pursuing justice in a world that is broken there are two kinds of pluralisms that will help us. First, God has created a pluralism of structures that need to be recognized. Government is under the authority of God, and so are families, educational institutions, businesses, non-governmental organizations and so forth. As we think about culture we have to consider the responsibility of all these different institutions. Second, we have to think about what it means to do justice to people of worldviews other than our own. Christians want government to recognize our right to shape institutions like schools and non-profits according to our own worldview, but we also have to challenge ourselves to determine whether we are supportive of the worldview expression of other groups in society. Is it more Biblical to encourage freedom of worldview – no matter what the foundation of that worldview might be, or is it more Biblical to support only institutions that reflect Christian presuppositions?

In his summary of *Christian Courier's* history, Bert Witvoet writes with a provocation: "Time will tell, and God already knows, whether this up-and-coming generation of Reformed Christians is up to the challenge of assuming its cultural responsibilities in the arena we call the Canadian Public Square." I am looking forward to writing for and hearing from readers interested in meeting this challenge.

Julia Stronks teaches political science at Whitworth University, a Presbyterian school in Spokane, Washington. Her family watches Fiddler on the Roof *every year.*

Principalities & Powers
David Koyzis

Homeland security

According to the great American poet Robert Frost, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." In our highly mobile society, home has a multi-layered meaning. At the corner store, going home means returning to our permanent address – to the place we are living now, identified by street number and postal code. Travelling to visit relatives, going home may mean a journey to revisit the region where we were born or grew up. It could even imply a visit to an ancestral homeland – a country we may never have been to but whose contours we know thoroughly from stories told us by our immigrant parents or grandparents.

For me *home* has all of these connotations and more. Hamilton, Ontario, has been my home for 26 years. I have lived here longer than anywhere else, and in that time I've grown to love it and everything about it. Though constantly overshadowed by Toronto in the popular imagination, it boasts a lovely natural setting along the Niagara Escarpment. The Bruce Trail is a short walk from our house, as is a magnificent view of Lake Ontario. We are never more than a few minutes from a waterfall. Hamilton is a favourite of film producers because of the sheer diversity of landscapes found within a fairly small area.

Yet for me Hamilton is home because of the people who have become dear to me over the years, including Redeemer University colleagues, former students who have settled here and, of course, my wife and my daughter, who was born here. Our church community, now 175 years old, has become our *home* church.

Four generations

Our family usually makes an annual pilgrimage to the Chicago area, where I was born and grew up. Topographically, that region is not especially interesting and lies in a flood plain. The farmlands that were never too far from our home when I was younger have mostly disappeared and been swallowed up by the sprawling suburbs. Nevertheless, it means a lot to me to be able to visit the elementary school where I was educated, to see the two houses our family lived in and to look for remnants of the electric railway that once passed through my hometown. Most of all, the presence there of four generations of family means everything to me.

Young David with his Grandma Marie.

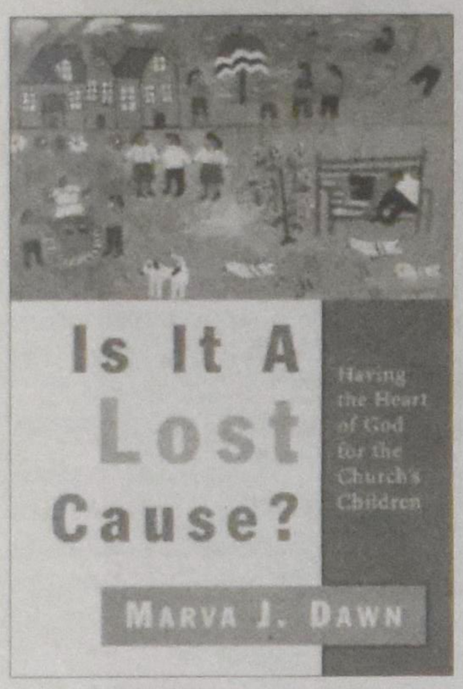
Then there's the state of Michigan, where my mother was born and where I spent so much of my childhood visiting relatives. I have deep roots there going back to 1882, when my great-great-grandparents, Niilo and Anna Juntunen, brought their infant daughter (my great-grandmother) from Russian-controlled Finland to settle in the Upper Peninsula near the shores of Lake Superior, very likely arriving by way of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Three sets of great-great grandparents, two sets of great-grandparents and a grandmother lie at rest in the Great Lakes State. Though I never had a permanent address there, Michigan still has a homelike feel to me.

The term *homeland* sometimes has political significance, but not always. Early twentieth-century Germans spoke of *das Vaterland*, the fatherland. Russians call the Second World War the Great Fatherland War, because it was fought on Russian soil, even as they continue to speak of "Mother Russia." After the 9/11 attacks the United States established the Department of Homeland Security, a seeming redundancy that the Department of Defence should have made unnecessary. The flag and arms of the Swiss canton of Vaud carry the motto: "*Liberté et Patrie*" – Liberty and Fatherland. Here fatherland refers, not to Switzerland but to Vaud itself, suggesting that, even a country as geographically compact as Switzerland may be too large to feel like a real home to many people.

So where is *my* homeland? I am a citizen of two countries, with an apparent right to claim two more citizenships through my father's birth as a British subject in Cyprus. I should be the stereotypical cosmopolitan, but I really am not. My earthly homeland is the Great Lakes Region. Yet, from my reading of St. Augustine and from my Cypriot relatives' painful experience of exile, I know that our earthly homes are never completely secure. Given the multi-layered meaning of *home*, I can accept more than one earthly home while recognizing that our ultimate loyalty is to the city of God, the only place that can genuinely offer homeland security over the long term.

David T. Koyzis has taught politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont., for just over a quarter of a century. His next book on authority, office and the image of God is forthcoming from Pickwick Publications, a division of Wipf & Stock.

Reviews



Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children
by Marva Dawn
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997, 256 pp.

Not a lost cause: raising Christian children

Melissa Deelstra

I first read *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* on the recommendation of a great professor and chaplain, Dr. Syd Hielema. Before long, my copy of the book was filled with underlined paragraphs, notes, comments and questions. I loved the book. It addressed the critical issue of the church's children and offered a comprehensive, challenging and constructive response. I was very excited to learn that the author, Marva Dawn, was scheduled to speak at the next teachers' convention hosted at Redeemer University College.

Being five months pregnant at the time, I made the necessary restroom stop on my way to the auditorium to hear Marva Dawn's lecture. I vaguely remember holding the door open for a cheerful, little old lady hunched over a walker. I briefly wondered what she might be doing at a teachers' convention as I made my way over to a seat next to my husband in the auditorium. You can imagine my surprise when, 10 minutes later, the same woman made her way slowly to the stage to be introduced as the Marva Dawn I was so eager to meet. Far from being another hip, new authority on the topic of children and young people in the church, I wondered if she might be in need of a new hip.

My prejudice quickly disappeared as the lecture began. Marva Dawn led the audience through the Scriptures to better understand God's gift of the Sabbath. Both her speaking and writing are deeply grounded in Scripture, powerfully challenging, and full of encouraging hope. She is an internationally renowned theologian, author of more than 25 books and educator with four Masters degrees and a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics and the Scriptures from the University of Notre Dame.

In her book, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, Dawn urges parents, congregations and church leaders to see what is happening in our culture and to our children. She challenges her readers to think intentionally about raising genuinely Christian children and offers some practical (but not necessarily easy) ways in which we can have the heart of God for all his children.

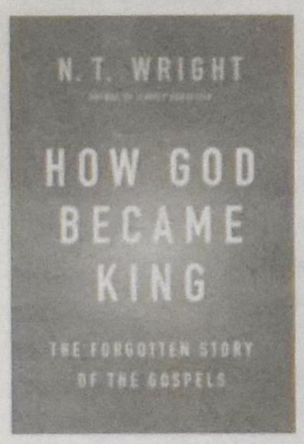
Dawn encourages parents to make time for Sabbath keeping, devotions, shared meals, intimate conversations and shared hobbies and chores with their children, while limiting and critiquing media consumption. She refers to Quentin Schultze's suggestion of establishing a three-to-one-ratio of family interaction/relational activities and media consumption. In addition to setting limits on media consumption, Dawn instructs parents to spend time teaching their children how to analyze, critique and respond to the media they consume.

Dawn reminds the Church of its significant role and responsibility in the lives of God's children. She challenges churches to deliberately welcome and invite children to participate in church activities. Youth can serve as greeters, ushers, money counters or readers. Dawn suggests pairing youth with senior members who can teach one another, be friends in mutual faith and develop community across generations. Youth groups cannot compete with local school or athletic programs and should instead offer what the world cannot – bible study, meaningful Christian service projects, Christian camps, choirs, instrumental groups and relationships with older church members.

Dawn insists that church leaders must spend time each day immersed in the Word and in prayer. Scripture is an activist story that prompts us to action loving our neighbour, welcoming the outsider and not turning away from those in need. Teaching the story of the Bible to our children assures them that they have a place and purpose in that story. Dawn explains that when we teach our children to pray we are "inviting them into waiting – for God's way and timing, clearer insight, firmer wisdom, giving up our own control in order that God's purposes can really be done." As leaders in the church immersed in the Word of God and in prayer, we can be authentic examples for a future generation of church leaders.

"Raising genuinely Christian children in a culture that chooses many idolatries to try to assuage or repress its restless hunger is NOT a lost cause IF . . ." Dawn concludes, ". . . the Church stands as an alternative community, incarnating – though imperfectly now – the kingdom of God for which everyone most deeply yearns." Rather than allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by the challenges of raising children in a fallen world, Dawn urges her readers, "Let's not ask God for anything small. He wants to use us for his world-transforming purposes."

Melissa Deelstra (scrapper21@hotmail.com) lives in Chatham, Ont. with her husband and daughter.



How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels,
by N.T. Wright
Harper Collins, NY
2012, 282 pp.

The Context of a King

John Koole

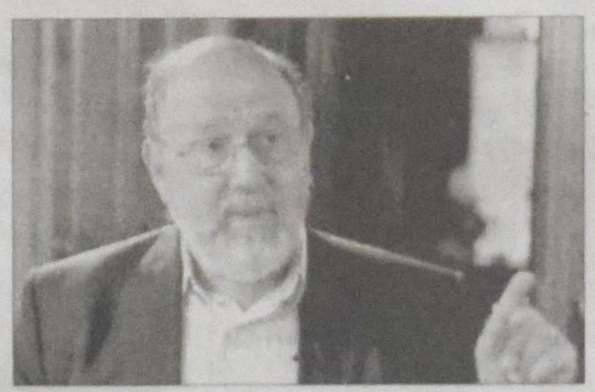
Since Tom Wright was guest lecturer at a conference at Toronto's Institute of Christian Studies in 1986, he has served as Bishop of Durham and written a great many books, a great many indeed. *How God Became King* continues to press his concern that the New Testament be read as the second volume of a book about God's unchanged plan of salvation for Israel and, through Israel, the whole world. Losing sight of the continuity of Scripture's message has led today's Bible readers to misunderstand Paul's main thrust in his writings, and to neglect to incorporate the Gospels' story of Jesus' ministry into their theology.

Throughout the book, Wright uses the image of a quadraphonic sound system, telling us that we must adjust our speakers so as to hear four strands of the gospel message in proper balance: 1) the story of Jesus as the climax of Israel's story; 2) the story of Jesus as the continuation of God's age-old plan of salvation for the world (not as his plan B put in operation because of the failure of the law as a way of salvation); 3) the story of Jesus as his launching of a renewed people of God; 4) the story of Jesus told as a "clash of kingdoms" in which the kingdom of Satan and this world's powers gives way to the new power of rule through suffering and servanthood.

Here Wright forcefully points out the ironic moments in the gospel story: Jesus' words to Pilate about power and the power of a believer to become a child of God (John 19 and 1); Jewish priests charging Jesus with fomenting unrest against Rome while they blaspheme by declaring as king an emperor who thought himself a god; Pilate's naming Jesus as king of the Jews, when the church sees Jesus enthroned on the cross as king of the whole world.

Wright also reacts strongly against American Christians' baptism of right-wing or left-wing politics, while capitulating to Enlightenment philosophy's theory of separation of church and state. If Christ is even now ascended ruler of the world, and rules by testifying to the truth (John 18:37), can his followers think that justice and peace will come to the world with Caesars' bombs and bullets? Following Daniel's vision, God's people receive the kingdom and themselves become kingdom bringers through a witness that involves suffering.

Wright's words about the forgotten story of the gospel raise discomforting questions. The Ecumenical creeds were drawn up to deal with issues of the day, but the Apostles' Creed is something of an "empty cloak," says Wright. It goes from "born of the Virgin Mary" to "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Where is the middle? Where is the body? Why does Jesus heal multitudes, drive out demons, teach parables, talk of the future? Have we set ourselves off track by emphasizing the creeds? In teaching the creeds have we stifled serious investigation of the gospels by suggesting all questions have been already answered? We criticize Rome's stand on tradition but focus on incarnation and atonement in obedience to our own Reformation tradition as though the rest of the story is unimportant. Yes, other Christians have the body without a cloak, moral lessons with no incarnation and cross, but that is hardly an excuse for us to deal only with the start and the finish. One example of the problem is Wright's explanation of the "image of God." We all know what that is: the third Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism describes three qualities. Wright suggests that humanity is created as the focus point in temple earth, like a statue in a heathen temple, a physical representative of God on earth. Jesus takes up this temple-like focus in making himself the replacement of the Jerusalem temple as the meeting place of earth and heaven. They are not incompatible pictures, but would one come upon Wright's picture by way of the catechism? Would it ever occur to us that with an emphasis on the start and the finish we might be in danger of seeing the Lord's divinity and humanity out of context? Do our creeds teach us that Jesus in his ministry is revealing Yahweh the healer of our diseases, the destroyer of enslaving powers, the recoverer of outcasts rather than the self-satisfied who need no physician?



NT Wright is an Anglican bishop, and leading New Testament scholar.

Wright's book is surely worth the study, and will send you back to reading the gospels straight through while reflecting on their Old Testament background and relation to the creeds.

Rev. Koole is a retired CRC minister living in Strathroy, Ont.

Features

'a small bench by the road'

Cathy Smith

Home is an allusive word, instantly sparking childhood memories, familial connections and primal longings. Small wonder that Ikea's slogan is "Long live the home" or that Tim Hortons sells coffee to the tune of the chart-topping "Home" by American Idol winner Phillip Phillips. The Home Hardware TV commercial with its cheery jingle, "Homeowners Helping Homeowners," always twinges my conscience, however, implying that homeowners are, after all, a cut above. Tempted as I am by glossy décor magazines with their fantasy images of trendy homes, and invested as I am in my own home, I suspect that pride of home ownership might simply be an alias for idolatry.

I'm intrigued that two iconic female writers have chosen *Home* as the title for their most recent novels. Pulitzer-prize winning author Marilynne Robinson's 2008 *Home* is masterful. The protagonist, Glory, returns to her childhood home, having ended a futile relationship with a married man. Caring for her ailing father and her alcoholic brother, and for the house itself, she both finds and demonstrates glory in her self-sacrificial love.

Last year African-American author Toni Morrison also published a novel called *Home*. A response to Robinson's? Possibly. Both books are set in the south in the 1950s. Morrison's characters inhabit a grim segregated landscape where police routinely check black men on the street for weapons in order to steal their money, a pastime so commonplace it barely warrants comment. While racism figures in Robinson's novel as well, it's viewed more comfortably from the genteel veranda of the Boughton home. Regardless of whether Morrison is deliberately referencing Robinson's work, both authors are pointedly addressing our own culture as well – with its countless divorces, digitally-engrossed teens and cliff-hanging economic futures. Both novels are achingly poetic testaments about the pull of home and about finding a place among your own people.

Home, *Toni Morrison.*

Unlike Morrison's 1988 Pulitzer-prize winning novel *Beloved,* an epic tale about a runaway slave, *Home* is surprisingly compressed, lean, terse. Characters are not immediately identified as black or white, but it's still woefully easy to figure out the colour divide. Slavery is gone; its legacy remains.

The quest

Frank Money returns from the Korean War, deeply damaged. "You can't imagine it because you weren't there," he tells an unnamed interviewer. As we follow him back to Lotus, Georgia, the home he couldn't wait to leave, his undiagnosed, and as yet not medically-recognized, post-traumatic stress disorder is gradually revealed. He suffers from hallucinations, blackouts and fits of violence. He medicates himself with alcohol, his anguish stemming from the horrific deaths of his "homeboys," two friends he couldn't save in combat, and an even greater anguish about a secret crime. A cryptic note from his sister's friend to come and get her because "she be dying" gives him a chance to redeem himself.

Frank and his sister Cee have always been close. "She was the first person I ever took responsibility for," he says. Their parents were forced to flee their Texas home by "hooded" men when he was a child and Cee was still in his mother's womb. A neighbour who refused to comply was strung up on the magnolia tree in his own yard. Those who snuck back to bury him under that same tree whispered that his eyes had been gouged out. The traumatic exodus unites the brother and sister, though it scars them for life.

The Money family (Frank notes the irony of their pennilessness) is reluctantly taken in by their grandfather. He has married an avaricious widow, Lenore, who "owned her house" in Georgia. She seethes at the imposition. To Frank and Cee, she is a wicked witch who puts water on their cereal instead of milk and routinely switches their legs.

The stifling atmosphere in Lotus, "the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield," leads Frank and his buddies to join the army. Cee also flees Lotus with "a rat" named Prince who marries her and then promptly abandons her in Atlanta. She finds employment with a white Confederate-sympathizing doctor who drugs her and practises "inventions" on her in the interest of eugenics. By the time Frank reaches her, Cee is dying of uterine hemorrhage. He brings her back to Lotus where the neighbourhood women save her life, but not her fertility.

As children, Frank and Cee once watched two stallions fight in a field. Frank recalls, "They rose up like men. We saw them. Like men they stood." The scene cements itself in his memory. "They were so beautiful. And so brutal. And they stood like men." That same night they also witness a black man being dumped in a hole under cover of darkness by a gang of white men. The children are transfixed by terror and wait for hours before returning home, but no one has missed them because of a "disturbance." Decades later, Frank discovers that what they saw was the result of a ghastly "dogfight," a switchblade duel to the death between a black father and his son, compelled to fight for a crazed betting crowd. The father orders his son to kill him to bring the game to an end. It's an unspeakable but seminal event in the lives of the black citizens of Lotus who do what they can to help the bloodied son escape.

Beloved takes place in the antebellum South, *Home* in post-WWII America, but the struggle is the same – an unconscionable depreciation of humanity based on race. Are horses men? Are men horses? Or dogs? Frank escapes from a mental hospital and runs to the nearest black church for help. Rev. Locke commiserates: "An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better." When Frank hallucinates, all colour drains from his vision and the world becomes a "black-and-white movie screen." He wonders "if this is how dogs and cats and wolves see the world." On his journey he meets a boy whose arm has been shot off by a white cop and asks him what he wants to be when he grows up. The boy replies gravely, "A man." In that succinct answer lies the crux of the novel. What is a man? Who decides? Who is human and who is a brute beast?

At the end of novel, Frank and Cee dig up the bones of the man in the field and give him a proper burial under a wounded tree. For Frank, it's a redemptive act. On the grave marker he writes "Here Stands A Man," an inscription meant to honour the man killed for sport. But the incongruity of the verb "stands" instead of "lies" suggests a broader interpretation of the epigraph, one that encompasses Frank himself, the Texan neighbour who defied the KKK, the boy with one arm, and maybe even Christ. The women who nurse Cee back to health, for example, triumph over their circumstances with deep faith: "Some evil, they believed was incorrigible, so its demise was best left to the Lord. Other kinds could be mitigated. The point was to know the difference."

In spite of growing next to a river called Wretched, the tree is thriving. To Frank, it looked "strong" and "beautiful." It was "hurt right down the middle," but was still "alive and well." The tree is like the lotus, an exquisite flower rooted in the muck of ponds – vigor and beauty springing from the mire.

Coming home

Frank hated Lotus for its "unforgiving population, its isolation, and especially its indifference to the future." But, when he is "frank," when he finally confesses his secret shame, he finds healing there. Saving Cee in the nick of time marks the turning point, a happenstance that Cee's friend Sarah attributes to supernatural intervention: "Thank God. Exactly the way old folks said: not when you call Him, not when you want Him; only when you need Him and right on time." Frank believes he was "smart" to liberate Cee without violence, another clue to his transformation.

Cee, too, achieves healing. The women scold her: "You good enough for Jesus. That's all you need to know." They offer her love in their shared adversity, and she embraces their example of moral resilience. Frank realizes, "They delivered unto him a Cee that would never again need him." The final treatment for Cee is "sun-smacking," exposing her naked private parts to the sunshine for an hour ten days in a row. She is loath to do this, but Miss Ethel insists she needs a permanent cure: "the kind beyond human power." Like Frank, Cee decides she belongs in Lotus.

Art and the capacity to imagine

"You can't imagine Korea's horror because you weren't there," seems a valid assertion. But authors don't really believe that. Authors write, as Solzhenitsyn said, because "Art extends each man's short time on earth by carrying from man to man the whole complexity of other men's lifelong experience, with all its burdens, colour and flavour." Art germinates and grows the imagination.

In a speech Morrison once decried the fact that "there's no small bench by the road" to honour the memory of the anonymous multitude of slaves whose deaths went unrecorded. Galvanized by her remark, the Toni Morrison Society began a campaign to place benches at historically significant slavery sites. Her novel *Home* is itself another "small bench by the road," a memorable work that helps us imagine, even though we weren't there, the complexity of being black in America in the 50s.

Phillip Phillips sings, "If you get lost, you can always be found / Just know you're not alone / I'm gonna make this place your home." His catchy song speaks to the need to belong and the power of human love. As I grapple with my own middle class responsibilities, and idolatries, I place my hope in an even greater love: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is Features Editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

Family visits: a thing of the past?

Peter Frieswick

I don't remember my first home visitation, but I do remember the last. I was 16, and before the elders arrived, I told my mother I wasn't sticking around to let two out-of-touch men perform a spiritual inquisition on me. I left to watch a movie after she told me to stay, but not before I dressed a large stuffed gorilla with my clothes and left it in the living room with a note that read something like, "talk to the monkey."

While my teenage response may not be typical of most CRC members, a growing body of evidence suggests the sentiment behind it is. Rev. Bill Van Der Heide of Ocheyedan CRC in Iowa suggests that people in many churches are more resistant to home visits. "The age group from twenty-somethings on up to about 45 would probably say, 'I have no idea what it is all about and I don't think it's necessary so I'll try to get out of it if I can.'"

Similarly, Henry DeMoor, Professor of Church Polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, writes in his *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary* that for many people, the traditional home visit has become "an outdated formality."

This attitude also appears to be shared by a large number of pastors and elders. In 2007, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) conducted a survey where 46 percent of respondents reported it was "definitely untrue" or "hardly true" that "in the past six months, someone in leadership has talked to me about my spiritual life."

More than not receiving a home visit, it means that for the 26 percent who reported "definitely untrue," no one in the church leadership called, emailed, or even casually talked to them about their personal faith. This is remarkable, because assuming they were in church for 40 out of the 52 Sundays in a year, it means they were not once asked by a pastor or an elder why they were even there. As a result of this survey, the CRCNA recommended to Synod 2010 that, "The denomination's churches should pay greater systematic attention to keeping in touch with souls, in the manner of the traditional household visit."

Article 65 change

The same year, however, Synod made a significant change to the Pastoral Care section of the Church Order. Where Article 65 formerly read "The minister of the Word and elders shall conduct annual home visitation," it now reads, "The officebearers of the church shall extend pastoral care to all members of the congregation and to others whenever possible."

"They took the word 'annual' out, and said that the new wording, 'reflects the reality that pastoral care today requires flexibility in the methods used to provide it,'" Professor DeMoor said in a phone interview.

DeMoor cautioned against seeing the updated article as doing away with home visits altogether. "Note that the language of 'whenever possible' in the current Article 65 does not refer to the frequency of home visiting but, rather, to the extension of pastoral care beyond just congregational members to 'others whenever possible.'" In his book, DeMoor calls the change "welcome," saying it acknowledges that though home visitation is "important," it is "still just one of a number of methods used to be 'Christ's presence' in believers' lives."

However, there are some in the CRC who are more pessimistic about the new wording. One pastor in Ontario who did not wish to be named said he believes the removal of "annual" from Article 65 will result in "reduced accountability" for ministers and elders. "The change would seem to me to allow for more flexibility and creativity in home visiting, which is a wonderful thing. But the reality will be that it will probably end up meaning a whole lot less home visiting, or perhaps no home visiting at all," he said.

As of yet, there is no statistical evidence to back up this claim. Nevertheless, it is representative of a growing belief that churches, for whatever reason, are no longer conducting home visits. Rev. Van Der Heide was amazed by the emails he received and blogs he heard about after presenting a recent CRC-sponsored webinar entitled "Elder Visits in the 21st Century." He said, "There's a sense that we ought to be doing this, but more and more churches aren't."

The question is: why not? According to Article 65, family visits are supposed to be positive, a time to encourage believers, "restore those who err in doctrine or life, and comfort and assist those experiencing adversity." Why would people reject this?

Why are people rejecting home visits?

There are a number of reasons. Retired Rev. Al Lindemulder, author of the blog post "Whatever Happened to Family/household Visits?", suggested on the phone that as the CRC continues to assimilate people from outside the denomination, and those who have converted to Christianity recently, the church will increasingly find home visits resisted by those who are not used to them.

Another reason for the decline is the negative expectation surrounding home visits. Rev. Van Der Heide related the story he'd heard from a fellow pastor, who called on one of the widows in his church soon after becoming the pastor. When he walked in the house, the woman was visibly upset. "What did I do wrong?" she asked. "'The elders are here to evaluate our spiritual lives,' is how it is perceived by both elders and those being visited," Rev. Van Der Heide said.

Church members are also less likely to believe in the benefits of home visits. One blogger who goes by the username "luimes," commenting on Rev. Lindemulder's blog post, had this to say: "The days of expecting to have impact on a family's spiritual life by visiting 'once a year' are long gone, if they ever truly existed. Did a once a year visit ever truly communicate that the church cared?"

And that is the real question: are home visits worth doing?

It is certainly worth noting that the same CRCNA survey that pointed to the significant decline in home visitations also found a "serious erosion" in the frequency of devotional practices that make up spiritual health. For example, the percentage of respondents reading the Bible daily dropped from 60 percent to 46 percent. Those having daily family devotions dropped from 60 percent to 43 percent.

Rev. Van Der Heide believes that home visits, along with regular follow-up, can be a powerful antidote to the poisonous mindset of wondering if there is any use in serving God. "I have witnessed people living like it really doesn't matter. Getting those who do fear the Lord to talk together, then, is in my view critical in the 21st century. And it is crucial that what they talk about be not just the weather and sports – but God's active involvement on their behalf in their lives," he said.

And that, Rev. Van Der Heide believes, means home visits are not for the purpose of rebuke. "It is not a discipline visit and discipline concerns ought not to be brought up," he said. For him, the only agenda should be affirming the faith of the family and encouraging them.

There are, of course, other excellent ways to increase the spiritual health and well-being of congregations that can supplement and even do away with home visits. An elder at Palm Lane CRC in Arizona said that they have largely replaced home visits with small groups. Two-thirds of his members meet together bi-weekly and receive "excellent spiritual and pastoral care" and accountability from the group. Only those not in these groups receive regular visitation.

For many reasons, the traditional model of family visits may no longer be a viable model for the 21st century. As the change to Article 65 suggests, we will continue to update our methods of caring for others in keeping with the reality of the time we live in.

However, regardless of what form it takes, believers need to keep caring and talking to each other. They need to share doubts, confess sins, acknowledge the Lord's presence and affirm each other's faith. Rejecting fellowship by saying "talk to the monkey" doesn't help anyone.

Peter Frieswick (peterfrieswick@gmail.com) recently completed a MA in English Creative Writing at the University of New Brunswick. He enjoys asking questions and sharing meals with friends.

My father

Lex Smid

My story starts 82 years ago in the village of Hijum in Fryslân, the Netherlands, beyond which there is nothing but the cold water of the turbulent North Sea. The sea stormed in to steal large pieces of the fertile land, but the inhabitants fought back, building small dikes, up to the time when land and water were separated by a strong continuous dike. But that happened long before my story which has its beginning in the *bedstee*, a sleeping alcove off the living room.

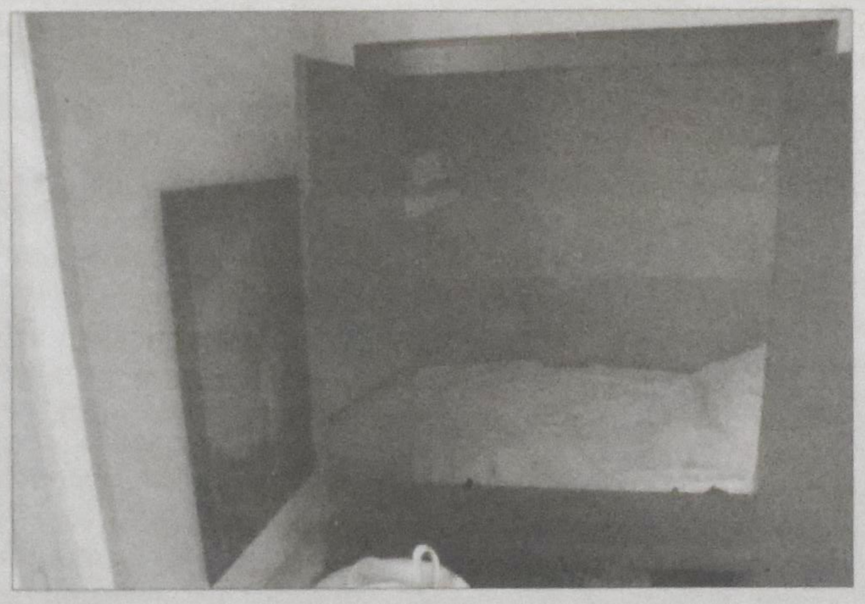
Like everyone else in those days, I was born in the confinement of a sleeping closet. It measured one meter wide by less than a meter and a half long. Facing the same way with their knees bent, there was just enough room for my parents to lie side by side. A shallow dug-out under the *bedstee* was filled with potatoes and above the foot of the bed was a shelf for the baby basket. It is hard to comprehend now that labourers' houses had only about 300 square feet of living space. Where did the children of the invariably large families sleep? They had to find some room in the attic which was accessible only by a steep and dangerous stairway. No way out!

My father was definitely awkward. He had two left hands when it came to handling tools. On a sultry summer evening as my parents prepared to go to sleep, my mother complained about the suffocating air in the unventilated sleeping alcove. "Can't you open at least one window to get a little cool air in here?" she asked Father. She knew she was playing with fire asking him to do repairs.

Mother Lacing Her Bodice beside a Cradle, *Pieter de Hooch, 1662.*

Old-fashioned bedstee.

Father was willing enough – give him a shovel and you would find no better man to handle that particular tool, or give him a sermon to read and he would do as well as a minister, but cutting loose a sliding window stuck in its wooden frame by several coats of paint was beyond his ability. He did not have the tools needed for such a job either. He was fortunate to find a hammer and a fire poker as a substitute for a chisel.



Snug by today's standards.

He managed to break the window free from the frame. He felt the welcome cool night-air drifting in. His wife would appreciate that, he must have thought. In his eagerness to please her, he tried the other stuck window as well.

Do I have to tell you? Of course, he broke the glass of that one. "That window was rotten," Father said as he climbed over his wife to land behind her on the straw-filled bedding. Mother envisioned the mess of broken glass on her red-painted floorboards and turned away from him. "But now we have a hole in the house," she said. "Yes," he answered, "we have a hole in the house, but we have also fresh air." Life was not always easy in those days.

In my story the attic was empty, since I was the first baby, and I was destined to sleep with my parents in the *bedstee* on the *bedstee*-shelf. The doctor came by a few days after I was born and noticed a small cyst on the top of one of my fingers and asked, "How in the world did that get there?" He proceeded to put the knife to it. My father knew the answer to that question. "Born in sin," he said, and who would know better than him?

Grace to a thousand generations

My dad was not only awkward with tools; he was definitely unhandy handling babies. If he had been the one to take care of me instead of my mother, I would more than likely not have become the old man I am now. The story goes that my sign and seal into the fellowship of believers did not go without difficulty on account of this. When Father took me from my mother's arms to be baptized, he almost dropped me, but held on to one of my legs, giving my mom the scare of her life and the congregation quite a diversion. The 80-year-old pastor, who had come all the way down from the high pulpit, waited patiently behind the baptismal font for my father to hand him the piece of paper with my name on it, but that slip of paper was carefully folded in his vest pocket – the pocket against which I was tightly held by my father's strong arm.

Up to now the pastor had not made a move, still waiting for my name. Father, not understanding the delay, looked nervously at Mother for help. She pointed at his vest pocket, which confused my father even more. The pastor smiled benignly, then mouthed to him, "The name. What is the name of the baby?" pointing at me. Now Father remembered. He made an attempt to retrieve the paper from the vest pocket, but quickly realized that it was impossible to get at without dropping me. I started to cry, just a whiney whispered cry. Father leaned over to the pastor, precariously holding me over the baptismal font and said softly, "Leffert – his name is Leffert." At just that moment, I started to cry in earnest. The pastor shook his head. He had not understood. The congregation became restless while I cranked up the volume.

Over the wailing of his son, my father said, much louder than he intended: "His name is Leffert!" Just then I stopped crying, as the story goes, and so, not only the pastor, but the whole congregation knew what my name was. The pastor quickly put his hand in the water and sprinkled some of it on my head, thereby administering the holy baptism. He used the simple yet awesome words of Matt. 28:19: "Leffert, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen." The organist hit the first note of Ps.105:5, held it a few seconds, and then the congregation fell in: *Jehovah's truth will stand forever / His covenant-bonds He will not sever / The word of grace which He commands / To thousand generations stands....* This happened at the very beginning of "The Hungry Thirties".

Grace told and re-told

My father was a bumbler alright, except when it came to story-telling. He made up characters as he went along. The rich and mighty were not the heroes of his stories, but the underdogs and those who were short of stature. You see, my father was rather short, a fact my dear wife had to point out to me long after we were married since I remembered him as being tall. One of his characters was called Little Denis. Little Denis could walk straight up telephone poles; he walked over the wires just as fast as anyone else could walk on the road below. Big Denis was, of course, unable to do this.

No one could tell the story of the mighty ship *Titanic* better than my father. After colliding with the iceberg, as the giant ship slowly sank and the band played *Nearer My God to Thee*, the tears would roll down my cheeks, and I, too, would feel close to God.

I can't think of any time in my life that I felt more safe and secure and proud to walk with my father than during the Hungry Thirties when he was unemployed and walked with two other men from one end of our village to the other end, smoking an empty tobacco pipe, talking about politics and church doctrine, about potatoes and sugar beets, and sometimes about things I should not have heard, and I had my little hand in his big hand.

Lex (Leffert) Smid is a member of Living Hope CRC in Abbotsford, B.C. He claims to be a good-looking senior who can walk without a stick when he has not forgotten to take his pills. Since we don't have a photo of Lex, we'll have to take his word for it.

Columns

The Vander Slikke farm.

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

Homesick

When our kids were young we didn't have much extra time or money for fancy vacations. But one year we splurged and took a whole week in Florida. We rented someone's timeshare condo and spent Jessica's twelfth birthday in Disney World.

That evening Jack and I chatted on the porch. James watched television and the girls were upstairs in their bedroom. I stopped in to say goodnight. Jessica lay cuddled up with a giant Minnie Mouse doll, tears shining in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

She swallowed hard. "I'm homesick," she finally said.

"What!" I said, "How can you possibly be homesick? Your whole family is here with you. Aren't we having a great time?"

Stephanie sprawled on her bed, propping herself up on one arm. "I get it, Mom. She just misses our home. It's where we belong. I've felt that way sometimes too."

Here I thought we had deprived our children of the adventure of traveling. I began to consider what makes home so special. Up until that point I had always equated the place with the people. By now I realize that while people and relationships are most important, home itself involves something other than that.

This farm has been our home for nearly 35 years. Jack and I have lived here our entire married life. We raised our family here and now we play with our grandchildren here. It holds memories of joys and heartaches, hopes fulfilled and a few dreams that will never be reality. There's not a building on the property that Jack hasn't constructed, renovated or repaired in some way. We've raised chickens, cleaned barns, planted and harvested field crops and watched the seasons come and go.

Context of my soul

Home is the place I know the best and the place where I am best known. It feeds my senses day after day, year after year. I hear the robins' gentle wakeup call on summer mornings, the combine chugging through the field in the fall and spring rains pelting the windows. Fragrance fills the air – fresh cut grass, laundry off the line or spaghetti sauce simmering in the kitchen. (Occasionally there's the heavy scent of full grown chickens on a humid July night, but we won't go there.) Winter's icy blast numbs my cheeks and lips, the sun warms my head as I pick stones in the spring and my arms ache from raking autumn leaves. I know every nook and cranny of the house and every square foot of the fields. This is my home.

Beyond the physical senses, home appeals to the intellect, emotions and spirit. Here I can cry when I need to, laugh at silly things when I want to and privately work my way through the whole spectrum of thoughts and feelings. Here is my comfy spot on the sofa, a pile of books on the floor beside me and my laptop never far away. This is the place where I greet God each morning and talk with him all day. Of course he's with me wherever I go, but this is where he's given me a daily routine. He walks with me around the farm, whispers echoes of Eden and spurs me on in constant prayer. Faithfully he calms my anxieties and energizes me for every mundane task or formidable challenge. This isn't just where my heart is. It's where my soul finds some context. It's where God has called me to be.

But it's temporary.

We're living here in exile, really – far from our true home, in fact. God has put eternity in our hearts. Like Qoheleth, Augustine and C.S. Lewis, I am keenly aware of yearnings within me for a place beyond my experience. How can I return to a place I've never been? It can only be that I am meant to live somewhere else.

Although constrained for now by time and space, my true context is eternity. Here and now I struggle like an astronaut returning to gravity after months of weightlessness. As wonderful as this life can be at times, I'm destined for a different world. Perhaps one of pain's greatest purposes is to remind us that we dare not forfeit the joys of heaven for the fragile pleasures of life here.

I am far more attached than I should be to this place I call home. It pains me to think that I'm fading like the flowers and someday "my place" will remember me no more. But on my good days I remember that the best is yet to come. My real home is a place prepared especially for me by God himself, a place of incomprehensible beauty, perfect relationships and everlasting contentment. It's where I belong.

Think of it!

Now I ask you – doesn't that make you a little bit homesick?

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

Artful Eye

Benediction in Georgia,
George Wesley Bellows, 1916.

Benediction

I've been waiting all week for this:
The minister's arms raised in awkward
sanctity –
a peculiar bend at his shoulders and elbows
that make me think he can't throw a baseball
and was probably beat up a lot on the
playground.

But now his soft hands with slender fingers,
nervously trembling above shoulders quickly
tired,
have become conduits of blessing.

And we are there waiting,
hands hungrily outstretched,
greedy for any scrap of grace we might receive
from this ersatz Father,
panting for benediction.

James K. A. Smith

Used by permission.
James K.A.Smith.
Letters to a Young Calvinist.
Brazos Press, a division of Baker
Publishing Group, 2010,
(**www.bakerpublishinggroup.com**).

James K. A. Smith is a Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College.

Columns

Borderless

Brent van Staalduinen

The other faces

I had to step away from social media for a few days while everyone was looking for Tim Bosma. I couldn't handle the flood. A couple of days into the search, when the story hadn't yet gathered its full head of steam, I posted a comment lamenting the lack of meaningful interaction on Facebook lately. I'm keenly aware of the irony, given that the next few days would see my newsfeed and Twitter accounts filled with nothing but meaning.

But I still had to step back. I was feeling overwhelmed. Both as an introvert who needed to re-boot after the deluge of best intentions, but also as a person who has a healthy skepticism of crowd-sourcing a kidnapping and eventual homicide investigation. Timelines were fragmented, well-intentioned attempts to help the police were often based on misinformation, the outpouring of viral support and creation of subsequent memes obfuscating which news was current or real.

In the margins

As often happens when I choose to recluse myself, I become more aware of the other faces, the ones not in the spotlight or generating the buzz. I'm not sure why that happens, exactly. Perhaps it is the eyes-open parallel to the clarity I can sometimes find when I close my eyes in the middle of something loud and frenetic. Tune out to tune in, so to speak.

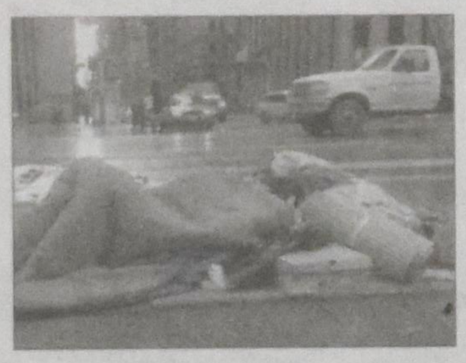
Regardless, I again became aware of the stories in the margins. While cyberspace and media-land were filled with bits and bytes about Tim, Sharlene, their two-year-old daughter, the grieving family and the outpouring of support from the CRC community, I stopped thinking about them almost entirely. Yes, it hit me hard when the news came through that Tim's remains had been found, an accompanying photo where he beams at the camera while holding his newborn daughter being especially difficult to see.

But then I stepped away again. My thoughts moved towards all those kids in Canada and beyond who've lost parents but do not have the chance to lean on stable families and generous churches as they mourn. Kids in Hamilton's inner city, for example, currently supported by a Children's Aid Society that will soon be eviscerated by budget cuts. Thousands of children who lost parents in that horrific garment factory collapse in Bangladesh. Pick your place, your tragedy: the world is hardest on fractured families.

No one should be criticized for having the desire to help the Bosma family, to host web pages and Facebook groups or to wedge flyers under wiper blades in malls. However, when tragedy happens so close by, a disproportionate response can work against a cause by confusing the facts, and it can also keep us from remembering that there are bigger needs out there.

The strength to see

My heart aches for the Bosma family. I also have to acknowledge that there are bigger hurts we are called to address. Sharlene and her daughter, while forced to mourn in such tragic and public fashion, will be more surrounded by those willing to help them walk towards healing than uncountable others who have lost husbands, fathers, brothers, friends.

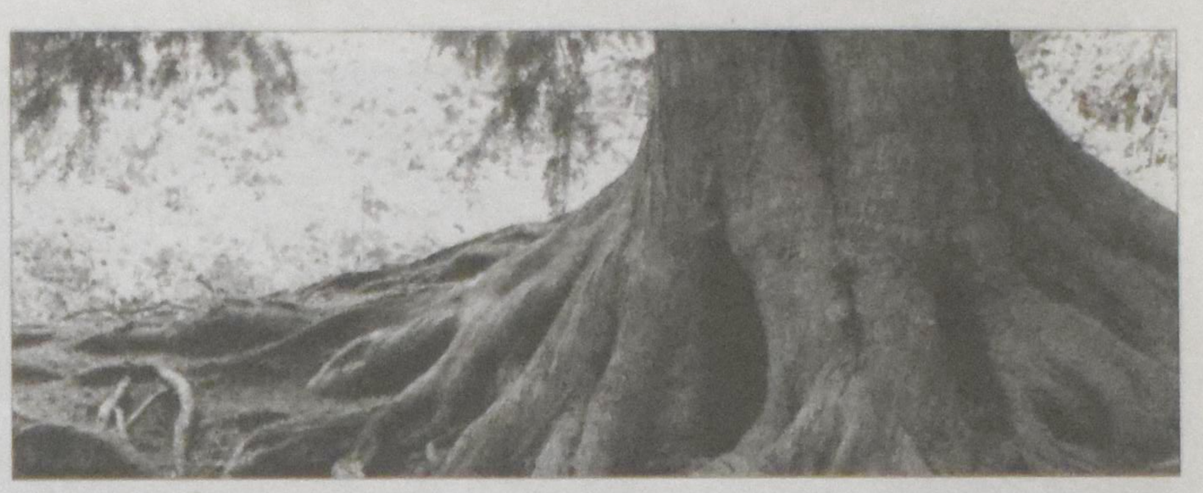


What will help us notice other faces of sorrow, when we're focused on a single tale of loss?

What will convict us to notice those other faces, almost universally misplaced when the media occupies us with a nearby tale of loss?

I know there will be some who will resent the audacity of using tragedy to make a point about greater need, saying that it diminishes the Bosma tragedy. But I don't think so. It is fallacious logic to suggest that raising awareness of an issue automatically diminishes another; in fact, we do ourselves, our communities and our world a disservice when we allow one issue to occupy us so completely we forget to look around. It requires little effort to respond when our social and informational spaces are filled with the tragic and sensational. Maybe we need to find the strength to look for other faces even as our eyes are dazzled, even as they fill with tears for the ones we love.

Brent and his wife Rosalee now live in the Westdale neighborhood of Hamilton, Ont. with their first child. To find out more about Brent and his writing, visit ***brentvans.com.***



Those who trust in the Lord are like deep-rooted trees, not bothered by drought (cf. Jer. 17:7-8).

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer

Oak tree trust

This year, the prolific beauty of the growing season is contrasted sharply by sorrow. As the first haze of green began to appear across the treetops, we heard news of the bombing at the Boston Marathon. Then, with the perceptible warming of the air, the story emerged of the decade-long kidnappings of three women in Cleveland. And with the first blossoms came the news of the disappearance, and then death, of Tim Bosma – a tragedy closest to home in so many ways. We are shaken by the irrefutable evidence that some people – without arousing suspicion – are capable of committing atrocities against others.

For many of us, these stories raise the question of trust. Is it safe to trust our neighbours, fellow members of our small towns or cities, the stranger next to us on the bus? Should we teach our children to believe in the goodness of others, or do we cultivate in them a cautious wariness? Without a basis of trust, how can our society function? Every time a terrible story hits the news, it erodes trust, at least for a time. I wonder how many people avoided flying after the 9/11 tragedy or thought twice about packing their kids off to school after the Newtown shooting last December. The erosion of trust is a driving factor behind terrorist acts, and I vividly remember Mayor Rudy Giuliani encouraging citizens of New York not to give in to fear after 9/11 but to fight the power of terrorism by choosing to continue life as usual in their city. When something bad happens, we are tempted to go into "lockdown" mode, trying desperately to protect everything we love by withdrawing. But in doing so, we shut out all the good things around us too, we make our lives small. Trust is a tenuous thing, but a full life cannot be lived without it.

Right to the core of me

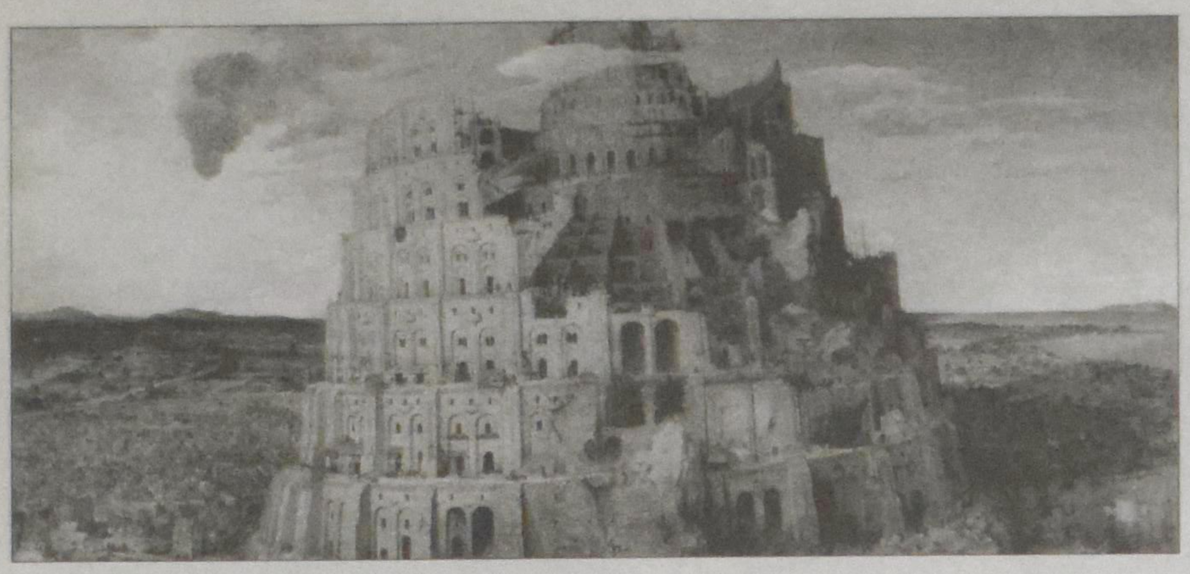
For Christians, these awful stories have a deeper layer and raise questions that are still more difficult to answer. My first thought when I heard that Tim Bosma had died was that if he were a member of my family, I wouldn't know how to trust God again. Even many steps removed, how can I pray for my husband, for my daughter, knowing that if the wrong circumstances transpire, God's protection is not guaranteed? Sudden suspicion toward the stranger walking down the street is difficult enough, but questions that erode my trust in God unsettle everything. They go right to the core of me. Theology about the problem of pain seems like fair-weather theology: it's helpful when all is going well, but it wavers ominously in the presence of tragedy.

But theology is for the mind, and pain is from the heart. Trust is from the heart, too – not always rational, but a gift that allows us to participate fully in life. Even my ability to trust in God is a gift. When that trust becomes a rational proposition, it fails me: "If I pray every day for my family, no harm will come to them." Times like these remind us that that kind of trust is actually the power of positive thinking, a formula I want to believe because it makes me feel in control of my life. But real trust – the Job kind of trust that accepts all things, even the worst things, as part of an all-encompassing, eternal and unfailing purpose for good – allows us to live a full life of abundance. Both the purpose and the ability to believe in it are gifts from God. In this season of sadness, I encounter the truth that I might, in fact, be a fair-weather believer.

What can we do now but pray for supernatural trust? We are still reeling from this evidence that life cannot be controlled and that prayer is not a formulaic guarantee. There is nothing to do but go to that place of pain and allow our trust to be reframed and reshaped there, directed not toward the ordering of a peaceable life but re-rooted in the bedrock of the larger life that is waiting. This is the oak tree trust that can withstand any weather. I long for it.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is currently perusing her bookshelves for the next read.

Columns



A ziggurat to serve as staircase.

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Towers of Babel today

As part of their studies, many engineering students learn about the dramatic failure of the Tacoma Narrows bridge, one of the longest suspension bridges of its time. The bridge was completed in 1940 and nicknamed "Galloping Gertie" because of the oscillating movement of its deck. The bridge eventually collapsed due to these oscillations, which were attributed to the bridge's design interacting with the wind in the Tacoma Narrows (thankfully, no people were injured in the collapse). Rather than being associated with a great engineering feat, the Tacoma Narrows bridge became a textbook example of a failure mode in bridge design.

The Bible also includes a story of an early failed technology project: the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). The story begins with the whole world having "one language and a common speech" and settling in a plain in Shinar. People gradually discover new construction technologies, namely using "brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar" (vs. 3). Using this new technology, they decide to build a city. Technology is not the issue per se; in fact, the previous chapter (Genesis 10) describes how God uses the technology of an ark to save humankind. Creation and cultural development carry the possibility of technology such as bricks and towers.

But cultural artifacts not only have a structure, they also a direction. In Gen. 11:4 we read, "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'" The motivation to build the city and the tower was to make a name for themselves; to glorify man rather than God. Furthermore, they built the tower so they would not be scattered over the face of the earth, in direct opposition to God's call in the cultural mandate to "fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Finally, they strive to build a tower that reaches to heaven, a tower that was likely a ziggurat that served as a staircase by which the gods could descend from heaven to bless a city.

Scattered

Humankind was seeking self-sufficiency and autonomy apart from God. Despite the effort to build a tower "that reaches to the heavens," in an ironic turn of phrase we read that God still had to "come down" to see the city (vs. 5). In Isaiah we are reminded of the fact that God "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers" (Isa.40:22).

We read that the Lord says, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (vs. 6). This is a puzzling verse; does human technology, then, have no limits? In a commentary on Genesis, Gordon Wenham suggests that another way of translating this verse is "lest nothing they plot to do be beyond them." Human beings are not like God, whose plans cannot be thwarted (Job 42:2). Humans are not supposed to emulate God but to observe limits.

God does not destroy the city, but confounds their language and the building project is halted. What they tried to avoid eventually happens: people were scattered, as God had originally intended. Neither do they make a name for themselves; instead their project commemorates their failure. The word for Babel sounds like the Hebrew word for confused, thus rather than being a monument to human accomplishment, it became a symbol of human pride and failure.

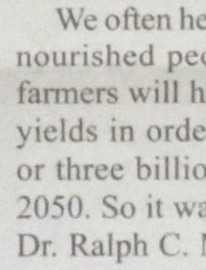
The Tacoma Narrows bridge taught civil engineers about aerodynamic resonance. The Tower of Babel still has lessons for us too. As we are increasingly immersed in technology, we would be wise to observe limits and remember to place our trust in the Lord. And we can look forward to the coming of a redeemed city, the New Jerusalem, "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

Derek Schuurman is author of a book which has just been released by InterVarsity Press titled Shaping a Digital World. *The book includes a section on the Tower of Babel.*

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

The obese and the malnourished



Blondie, of comic strip fame, reads the paper and says to Dagwood, "Look, there's a big refrigerator sale going on this weekend." He replies, "We already have a perfectly good refrigerator." She says, "Okay, but those snazzy new models can hold up to 25 percent more food." Dagwood, who loves eating a plate full of tall sandwiches, goes over to their refrigerator and says, "So long, ol' buddy."

A few weeks ago I read an article on food waste, which said that Canadians are more prone to wasting food than Europeans because we tend to have bigger fridges, shop once a week in larger quantities and eat out more often.

A recent survey of Canadian adult consumers found a large majority of them believe the price of food has gone up in the past year, prompting more than half to do more comparison shopping than before.

Really! How about simply cutting down on food that gets thrown out? That brings me to the "home" theme topic.

We often hear about the millions of malnourished people in the world and how farmers will have to keep improving crop yields in order to feed the projected two or three billion more people by the year 2050. So it was breath of fresh air to hear Dr. Ralph C. Martin speak on the subject to members of the Renfrew-Lanark Christian Farmers Association in a pre-recorded video at their recent annual membership meeting in Renfrew (at the Hebron CRC).

More than leftovers

Prof. Martin taught plant science at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College for over 20 years and was appointed the Loblaw Companies Limited Chair in Sustainable Food Production at the University of Guelph in August 2011. The Chair position is funded by a $3-million gift from Loblaws. A Canadian first, this position will lead the change in food production systems through education, research, practice and outreach within the context of the essential elements of sustainability, the environment, communities and the economy.

When Prof. Martin was growing up on his family's beef and hog farm near Wallenstein, Ontario, the challenge facing agriculture was producing enough to feed the world. Now he sees a shift from quantity-based farming to the need for sustainable practices and production of quality food.

"We often hear that farmers have to grow more food to meet the demand of the growing population, but 40 percent of our food is currently being wasted, so we need to explore where waste is happening and encouraging people to waste less," he says.

He suggests a two-pronged approach that involves educating women in developing countries to reduce food waste while decreasing food consumption in developed countries.

Scaling down

"Of the seven billion people in the world, one billion eat too little and 1.6 billion eat too much. And many of those 1.6 billion people eat the wrong kinds of food," he said.

The population in Canada consumes up to 30 percent more calories than required. He said people need to eat less meat, salt and sugar. It begs the question, how much high fructose corn syrup do we really need?

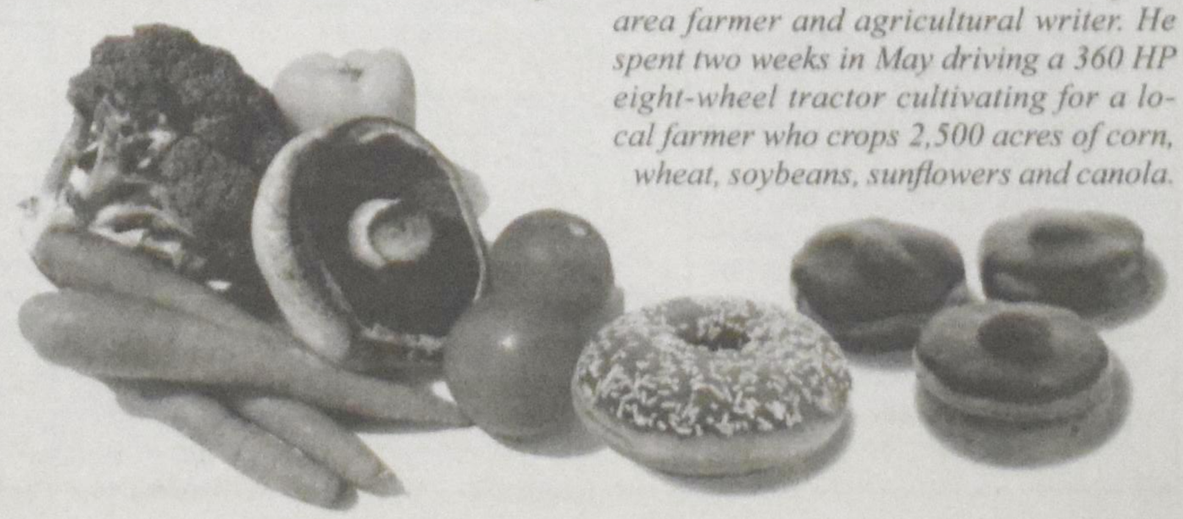
The Canadian Agricultural Policy Institute points out that two-thirds of Canada's health care costs can be attributed to chronic diseases associated with unhealthy eating.

Looking at it by calories, Prof. Martin said that in Canada we need 79 billion calories per day (based on 2,300 calories per person x 34.3 million people). If we overeat by 20 percent, that makes 94 billion calories consumed, and if we waste 40 per cent of the food produced, that means we need to produce 158 billion calories – fully double the 79 billion basic caloric requirement to feed our population.

Prof. Martin would like people to think about buying quality instead. Buy good foods. Pay a little bit more for some of the quality attributes that you want. Then eat it. Don't waste it. We'll all be better off, he says.

Who can disagree with that – besides maybe Dagwood?

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew area farmer and agricultural writer. He spent two weeks in May driving a 360 HP eight-wheel tractor cultivating for a local farmer who crops 2,500 acres of corn, wheat, soybeans, sunflowers and canola.



Classifieds

Anniversaries

On June 19, 2013

George and Elizabeth Hiemstra

will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary.

Along with our children, grandchildren, relatives and friends we want to remember God's faithful providence and care during all those years.

"You shall guide me by your counsel. . . " Psalm 73:24

Address: 208 - 200 Glen Hill Dr S
Whitby ON L1N 9W2

Nick and Betty Anema (nee Visser)

Sixty years ago, on June 24, God blessed them in marriage. He continues to shine his love and blessings on them.

Join us in recognizing this joyful occasion of their 60th Anniversary with an **Open House** on June 22, 2013 from 2:00 pm till 4:00 pm to be held in their backyard at 956 Norfolk St. N Simcoe, Ont. (behind the garage)

Stan & Valerie Anema
Lindsay & Ric, Nicolaas & Jill
Ray & Lisa Anema
Gabrielle & Tim, Brandon & Ashley, Christopher & Stephanie
Francine & Rick Ouwendyk
Ashley & Anderson, Bryan & Candace
Roger & Annalea Anema
Jade, Sydney
and six great-grandchildren.

Mailing Address: 976 Norfolk St. North
Simcoe ON N3Y-3R8

Fifty years ago, before family and friends we promised each other "I do, God helping us."

On June 29th we celebrate the gift of love and children. Our cup overflows, our quiver is full!

Jayne and Nick Loenen

Marianne and Calvin
Seth, Shaelyn, Tristan, Jordan
Michael and Marilyn
Andrew, Rebecca, Nicolas
Jeff and Annette
Anthony, Erica, Asher
Heather
Alexandre, Dominic

Richmond, BC nloenen@shaw.ca

Dan and Mary Vriend

60th Wedding Anniversary
16 June 2013

It is with great joy that we, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchild of Dan and Mary Vriend, wish to announce their 60th Wedding Anniversary!
We give thanks to God for these many years that we have been Family, and gratitude for His tender providence in our lives.

With love,
Richard & Jo-Ann Tavenier Vriend
Ben & Leanne Vriend
Bethany, Liam, Leah
Ken and Denise Vriend
Melissa & Steve Markle (Cameron), Daniel, Mathew
Calvin & Audrey Vriend
Graham & Allison, Martin, Laura
Anne & Robin Koning
Brayden, Caleb, Joshua

Address: 3634 -112 Ave.
Edmonton AB T5W 0M4

Birthday

Happy 90th Birthday

Anna Adema

June 5, 2013

We praise and thank God for her and all the love and Christian witness she has shown each one of us.
With love and admiration from her 13 children, their partners and quiver full of grand-and great-grandchildren.

Address: Holland Christian Homes
109 - 7900 McLaughlin
Brampton ON L6Y 5A7

Obituary

Tine Vander Vecht (nee Harlaar)

Peacefully at Woodstock Hospital on Tuesday May 20th 2013 in her 85th year.
She formerly resided on Victoria St., Woodstock.

Beloved wife of the late George Vander Vecht.
Dear mother of Pete of London, Homer of Barrie, Annette Zeyl of Dorchester, Diane (Rudy) Fluit of Windsor, Wilfred (Nicki) of Ingersoll, Margaret (Richard) Ball of Lakeside, Gary and Joe all of Woodstock.

Cherished grandmother of 26 grandchildren and great grandmother of 22.

Also survived by a sister, two brothers as well as several nieces and nephews all in Holland. Predeceased by her grandson Jonathan and son-in-law John Zeyl.

Tine was a volunteer with Telecare since it's inception, a volunteer with Live Action and a member of the Friendship Group at Covenant Christian Reformed Church.

A memorial service was held May 24th with Pastor Robert Loerts of Covenant Christian Reformed Church officiating.

If desired, contributions to Woodstock Hospital Palliative Care or John Knox Christian School would be appreciated.

Online condolences at
www.brockandvisser.com

Winschoten, NL — Brampton ON
1953 — July 7 — 2013

Frederik and Bernice Boven (nee Havinga)

Thankful for God's grace and faithfulness in our lives, we along with our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren plan to celebrate our **60th wedding anniversary** (DV).

Open House, 2-4:30 pm
Saturday, July 6, 2013

Horizon Hall, Holland Christian Homes,
35 Kingknoll Dr., Brampton ON, L6G 5G5

Fred & Ruth Boven – Schomberg, Ont.
Matthew & Leanne Boven
Curtis, Maya, Jacob, Madelyn, Gabriel
Philip Boven
Daniel & Amy Boven
Olivia, Annabelle
Alaina & Steve Venema
Aryel, Cecilya
Leanne & Daniel Greco
Raymond & Shirley Boven – Edmonton, Alta.
Julia Boven
Michael & Shannon Boven
Gregory & Larissa Boven
Isabella, Joshua
Theresa & Paul Wilson – Brampton, Ont.
Eric & Krista Wilson
Annika
Joel Wilson (†)
Ian Wilson
Theo & Tena Boven – Hamilton, Ont.
Benjamin Boven
Helen Boven
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1953 — June 12 — 2013

With praise and thanksgiving to God, we celebrate the 60th wedding anniversary of our parents

Sytze and Wilma Miedema (nee de Graaf)

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Dear Mom and Dad,

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Pauline & Rick Budding
Erica, Andrea, Alex — *New Hamburg, Ont.*
Gobind Kaur & Siri Atma Khalsa Singh
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Address: 8010 Hwy 37 RR 3
Tweed ON K0K 3J0 bert@hielema.ca

Classifieds

Unity Christian High School
would like to invite you to an open house to honour

Mr. Peter Bulthuis

upon his retirement as our principal.

All are warmly invited. Refreshments and a light snack will be served. If you are unable to make it but would like to send your warm wishes or cards please feel free to mail or email to the school and they will be presented to Mr. Bulthuis.

Date: June 22, 2013 Unity Christian High School
Time: 1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. 25 Burton Ave.
Presentations: 2:30 -3:30 Barrie ON L4N 2R3

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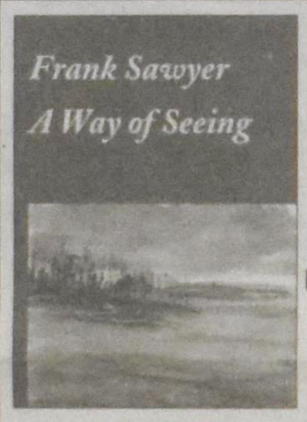

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Every May, the Canadian Mental Health Association promotes mental health awareness. With that in mind, *Christian Courier* asked two professionals in the fields of health care and social work to reflect on the mental health of teens and seniors. In this issue we look at the mental health of seniors. *Editor.*

The not-so-golden years

Glenda Dekkema-de Vries

My uncle passed away last week. He was in his "golden years." Although the funeral ceremony was jubilant – with laughter, assurances of life after death and song – the years leading up to his death were emotionally and physically difficult. He suffered with cancer. He was on dialysis. He could no longer do many of the activities he previously enjoyed.

My uncle – despite his ability to crack a joke or appreciate his loved ones and the nature surrounding him – recently told his son-in-law, "I'm not living in the golden years. You are."

Each person's experiences with aging affect him or her to different degrees: Bodies wither; cognitive abilities decline; loneliness sets in; aches and pains are felt; friends and relatives die.

It is no wonder that these difficult issues facing the elderly can trigger a mood disorder.

Resources

I interviewed Dr. Grant Mullen, Christian, family physician and author of *Emotionally Free*, a Christian book about living a transformed life. I was interested in his views concerning mood disorders – depression, anxiety and mood swings – in the elderly.

"Yes, they do have the additional issues you have mentioned, but the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment are the same as for others suffering from a mood disorder."

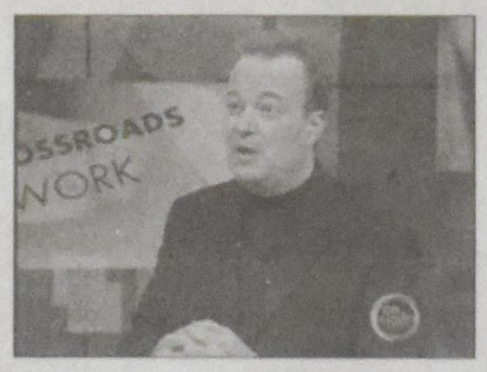
Dr. Mullen says Christians – at any age – suffer from mood disorders in unique ways because there is a spiritual element involved, and, in addition, many of them are reluctant to accept medical treatment. He says the church has a responsibility to deal with this tremendous problem affecting so many. Twice a week throughout May, he appeared on *100 Huntley Street,* speaking about mental, emotional and spiritual health.

"The elderly will benefit from a regular Christian support group for mood disorders," Dr. Mullen says, "just like anyone else." There is no need for seniors to have a separate support group. He emphatically agrees that *Living Room* (**livingroom-support.org**) is an excellent resource for churches. The website provides free resources for initiating a group in your local area.

In addition to *Living Room*, he suggests his curriculum involving DVDs (available through **drgrantmullen.com**). He says, "DVDs are very effective for people with mood disorders because the nature of the disease causes them to become easily confused during regular devotions. Watching a DVD and then talking about it afterward is much easier for them."

The last taboo

"The need in churches for dealing with mood disorders is staggering," Dr. Mullen explains. "The burden of suffering is so high. Ten to fifteen percent of church families are affected, and eighty percent of all cases go undiagnosed and untreated. Very few Christians are talking about this because there is a stigma associated with mental illness."



Churches need to address mood disorders, Dr. Mullen says.

He continues, "Christians get tripped up because they think they are dealing with a spiritual issue, when in fact, it is a mental health issue that is causing the problems. Because they think it is a spiritual issue, they try to go to Bible studies and prayer groups to find the answers there. They soon discover they can't concentrate or participate appropriately, so these places are of little help. Support groups specifically designed for mood disorders are very comforting because one realizes that other Christians are struggling with the same issues."

The body, soul and spirit

Dr. Mullen believes that "individuals are made up of the body, soul and spirit." He goes on to explain that the "body" can be affected by a chemical imbalance, often necessitating medication. The "soul" is the personality, involving current life experiences and wounds of the past, and its healing will often require counseling. The "spirit" can come under attack by Satan, for which spiritual support through participation in a program like *Living Room*, pastoral counseling and prayer can be effective.

"We need to address the body, soul and spirit of those suffering with mood disorders because they are all intertwined. If we deal with only one or two of these aspects of a person, there will be some recovery, but not to his/her full potential."

Seniors may feel as if they are not in their "golden years," but they certainly deserve all the necessary and effective mental, emotional and spiritual support possible, so that their remaining time on this earth can be lived to the fullest.

Glenda Dekkema-de Vries is a freelance writer living in Stouffville, Ont, with her husband and two girls.

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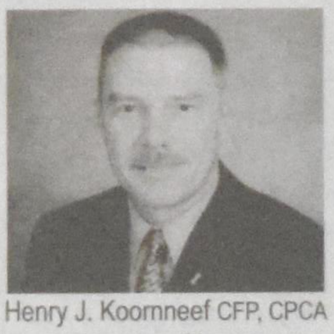
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 7 Retirement open house for Pastor James Dekker. See p.17 for details

June 9 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching. DVDs are available.

June 19 Hollandse Dag **Moorefield** Community Centre. 10 am. Speaker: Rev. John Klomps. Details next issue.

June 22 Unity Christian High School Open House. Peter Bulthuis retirement. See ad p.17.

July 1 Frisian Picnic, 11 am. Pinehurst Lake Conservation area, Paris, Ont. Contact fryskedei@hotmail.com

De Hollandse Dag

wordt dit jaar weer gevierd op Woensdag
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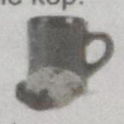

Een jaar is weer voorby,
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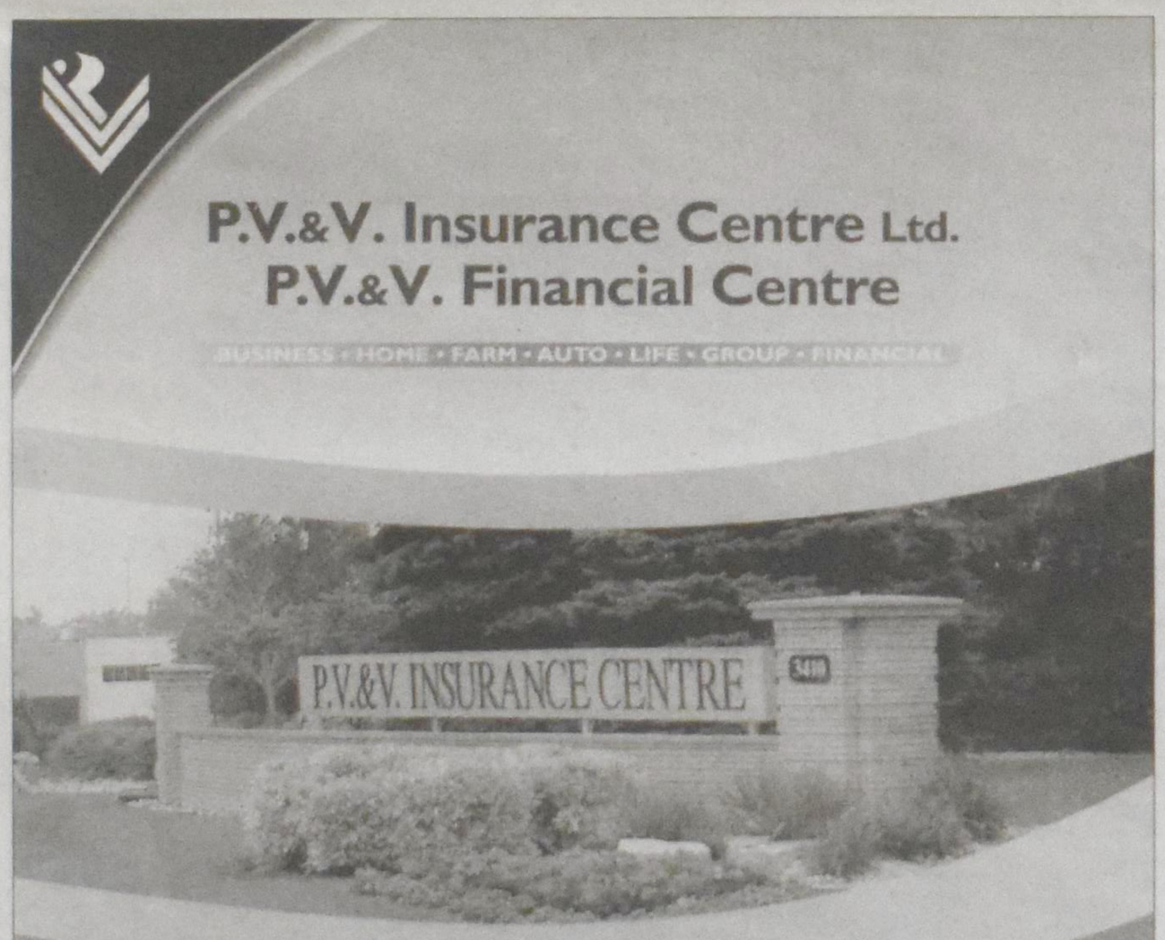

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